Master

techniques

The Secret Strength of Silk Organza

This delicate fabric adds weightless support to your garments without increasing bulk

BY MARLA KAZELL
(from issue #124)

If you envision frilly little girls' dresses, crisp sheer collars, or a translucent evening concoction when you hear the name "silk organza," reconsider. Silk organza is a fabulous workhorse fabric that you can layer inside a garment to add invisible, weightless support and strength. Among other things, silk organza will hold the shape of an edge, sleeve cap, or buttonhole. I'll show you several ways it can greatly improve the results of your sewing.

The incredible silkworm produces a filament strand far stronger than its delicate appearance and size would suggest. When this strand is woven into organza, it produces a fabric that's powerful and almost transparent. Silk organza is washable or dry-cleanable, withstands high heat and steam, and can be dyed any color.

Nylon and polyester organzas work for some of the same applications I'll describe but not as well, because they never press as flat or crisply as silk. A yard of silk organza costs only around $5—every inch of which is usable, so go for the best.

To prepare your organza for use, you should preshrink it. If you want to maintain its crisp hand, preshrink it with steam and then dry-clean your finished garment. For a softer hand, gently machine-wash the organza.

I recommend keeping a supply of silk organza as a basic sewing tool. That way, it's always available to help you construct almost any article of clothing.

Marla Kazell teaches fine-sewing techniques nationally and lives in Tigard, Oregon.

Photos: Sloan Howard, except background photos, pp. 2–3 and pp. 4–5, Scott Phillips

Create bulk-free seam or hem finishes

For a clean, bulk-free seam or hem finish on an unlined garment, use organza for a Hong Kong finish (see "Jacket-Facing Solutions," issue no. 123, for information on how to create a Hong Kong finish). To finish a set-in sleeve armhole made in sheer fabric, trim the armhole seam allowances down to ¼ inch wide and cover them with an organza bias binding.

Make a great press cloth

Silk organza makes the best press cloth. It can withstand high iron temperatures and steam. It is lightweight and see-through yet protects your fabric from damage.

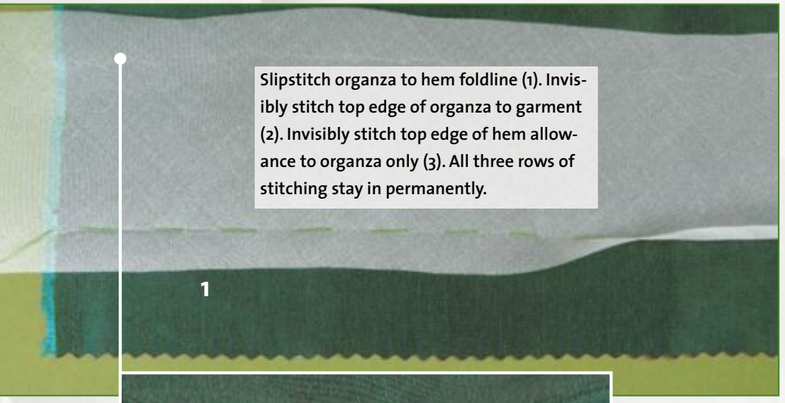
Use it to press back narrow edges without burning your fingers. To do this, place a single layer of organza on your ironing board. Lay your fabric facedown 4 inches or more from the edge of the organza and parallel with the edges; then lay a cardstock template (file folders work perfectly) along the foldline of the edge you want to press. You can hold the cardstock in position by pinning through it into the ironing board. With one hand, fold the organza over the cardstock edge; with the other hand, press the fold.

Use as an interfacing for hems

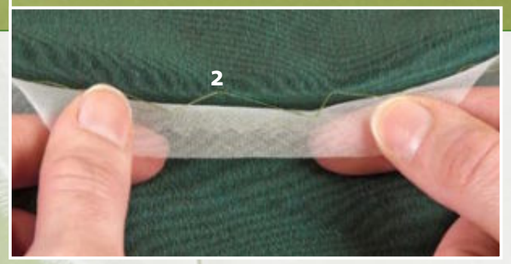
Organza makes a perfect interfacing for pant, skirt, and dress hems. Position a 3- to 5-inch-wide strip of bias-cut organza between the hem allowance and garment, as shown below, to provide a cushion that prevents the hem-allowance edge from leaving a ridge on the right side of the garment.

You can use silk organza as you would any other sew-in interfacing. It's lightweight but can stabilize and support a neckline, a collar, or buttonholes on a facing.

As an interfacing, organza can both strengthen a facing and clean-finish its outer edge. Cut matching facing pattern pieces from the fashion fabric and organza, and pin them right sides together. Stitch along the outer edge of the facing with a ¼-inch seam allowance, and press the seam allowance open. Turn the facing right side out, roll the edge of the seam slightly to the organza side, and press the edge flat. Sew the facing to the garment as usual.



Slipstitch organza to hem foldline (1). Invisibly stitch top edge of organza to garment (2). Invisibly stitch top edge of hem allowance to organza only (3). All three rows of stitching stay in permanently.



Temporarily bind raw edges

When constructing a garment from fabric that ravels easily, fold organza strips around the cut edges and hand-baste them temporarily into place with a running stitch. Scrap organza works well for this technique. It keeps the seam allowances from raveling before you can stitch and finish them.

You can also use this technique to temporarily hold a neckline in place and keep it from stretching before a collar, facing, or final binding is applied.

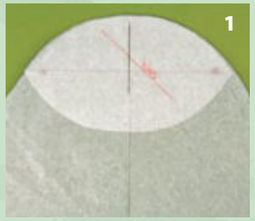
Add support to fabric

Underlining a garment with organza adds support, crispness, or slight weight to a fabric. It supports lightweight or limp fabrics for tailored styles, stabilizes loosely woven fabrics to prevent sagging or stretching, and adds opaqueness to sheer or light-colored fabrics.

Underlining linen with organza helps reduce wrinkling. It allows construction details like hem stitches to be concealed from the outside of a garment, because you stitch only to the organza and not through to the fashion fabric.

To underline, cut a pattern piece in organza and pin it to the wrong side of the corresponding fashion-fabric piece. Lay the double layer flat with the organza on top. Roll the seam edge toward the organza side to allow for the turn of cloth, and hand- or machine-baste ½ inch from the edge. Treat the double layer as one as you construct the garment.

Shape sleeve heads



Organza adds soft, springy support to a gathered or pleated sleeve cap. Using the sleeve-cap pattern as a guide, draw a straight line connecting the two notches. Fold a piece of organza on the bias, and position the fold along the line you just drew (1). Follow the sleeve-cap cutting line to cut the organza into a shape that resembles a football when unfolded.

Position a single layer of the organza along the sleeve cap, and from the right side of the sleeve, stitch gathering rows through both fabric and organza (2). The other side of the football remains unattached inside the sleeve.

For firmer support for a gathered sleeve, use a different sleeve head. Cut a bias strip of organza 12 to 14 inches long and 5 inches wide. Fold down 2 inches, and stitch two to three rows of gathering stitches close to the fold through both layers. Pull up the gathering threads (3) until the sleeve head is the desired length—6 to 7 inches—knot the threads at each end, and machine-stitch over the gathers to secure.

After sewing in the sleeve (shown detached), pin the folded head edge to the sleeve-cap seam allowance (4), following the seam. Loosely float-stitch the sleeve head to the armhole stitching line (5).

Provide lining for sheers

Use organza for lining sheer fabrics, especially prints. It adds some opaqueness but keeps the look sheer without a second layer of print showing through.

A layer of organza on a shoulder yoke adds support to the garment. Enclose the yoke seams, and trim them to ¼ inch.

Eliminate the need for a hem finish on a sleeve by lining it to the edge with organza. Stitch the sleeve and lining right sides together at the finished hemline. Press the seam open, and trim seam allowances to ¼ inch. With right sides together, sew the sleeve and lining in one continuous seam. Press the seam open, fold wrong sides together along the cuff seam, and press the hem edge.

Wrong

Right

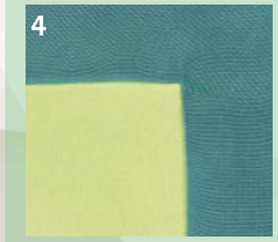
Secure edges and openings

Organza makes a delicate, shaped facing. Draw the edge shape on the organza. Position the organza on the right side of the fabric, and stitch over the drawn lines with a short stitch length. Trim close to the stitching through both layers; clip into the corners and around curves, and turn the organza to the wrong side. Roll the seam to the underside, and press the edge. This same process also works for clean, flat edges on various openings, such as bound buttonholes, design inserts, or welt pockets.

Stabilize.

Press and clip.

Stitch the corner.



Press into place.

Reinforce clipped corners

Inside corners such as the shoulder/neckline point of a shawl collar, a square armhole, or the point of a basque waistline must be clipped. To stabilize and protect this delicate cutting, pin a square of organza to the right side of the fabric at the corner. Mark the corner.

To staystitch around the corner, use a short stitch length, start and end about 1 inch from either side of the corner, and pivot at the point with the needle down (1). Clip through both layers of the seam allowance into the corner. Press the organza toward the seam allowance (2).

Continue the construction, matching the corner points and stitching as directed, keeping the organza pressed away from the seamline (3). When the final seam is pressed into place, the organza helps fill in the gap created by clipping into the corner. The inset corner is now perfectly sewn (4).

Stabilize seams

When seams need to be stabilized to prevent stretching, cut or tear crossgrain strips of organza ⅜ inch to 1 inch wide to use as stay tape. Tearing strips results in enough raveling to soften the edges and prevent a ridge from showing through.

Use organza strips on V-necks, diagonal slash pockets, and shoulder seams. For curved seams, shape the crossgrain strips with a steam iron, gently stretching one edge and shrinking the other, following the curved shape on your paper pattern piece.

Cut the strips to the length of the seamline, measuring the paper pattern, not the garment. Pin the stay tape to the wrong side of the garment, centering the tape over the seamline. Ease in any fullness that may occur if the fashion fabric stretches, and hand- or machine-baste in place. The stay remains in the garment permanently.

Lightweight wool gabardine makes an ideal unlined coat for temperate climates. Such a beautiful drape comes from keeping the sewing and finishing simple—soft fusible interfacing for cuffs, collar, and edges, and silky rayon tape binding for all the seam allowances—as described in this article. (Photo by Yvonne Taylor)

Getting the Best of Gabardine

Careful pressing, interfacing, and finishing produce a classic, long-lasting garment

by Shermane B. Fouché

(from issue #41)

As a custom dressmaker, my favorite clothes are those that can go anywhere and look couture, but that don't take couture time to sew. The ideal timeless fabric for such clothing is wool gabardine. You can use the cleanest and simplest of construction and create garments that are elegantly finished.

Wool gabardine is a tightly woven twill fabric made from worsted yarns. (See *Basics*, issue no. 41, p. 16, for weave and wool information.) The twill structure gives gabardine a beautiful drape, while the worsted character makes its surface smooth and lustrous. Gabardine doesn't soil easily because it's so tightly woven, and it resists wrinkles. The most tightly woven wool gabardines are actually water resistant.

The same qualities that make gabardine so appealing make it tricky to use. Sewers often complain that seams won't iron flat or that gabardine is difficult to interface and to topstitch. But it doesn't take fancy equipment to press gabardine, as I'll explain. And if you apply soft fusible interfacings, rather than sew-in ones, you can achieve a beautiful garment in minimal time. Here are the methods for handling gabardine that have worked for me:

Choosing a gabardine

Wool is not the only fiber made into a gabardine, but I think it has the best qualities. Rayons, cottons, and microfibers are also made into gabardines, but they don't have the same abrasion resistance, all-weather characteristic, and drape as the wools.

To test for quality, durability, and drape, I feel the fabric. I roll a length off the bolt and hold it to my waist, gather it with my hands, and let it drape over my knees to see how it falls and moves. Think about how you want your garment to look and choose the fabric accordingly.

Look for closely woven gabardines that have a high thread count per inch; I hold fabric up to the light to test for opaqueness, an indication of a tight weave. Tightly woven gabardines will be more durable, will shrink less in preparation, and will resist wrinkles more than loosely woven ones.

I've used English, Italian, and American wool gabardines. The English menswear gabardines, which tend to have a high thread count per inch, are my first choice. When crumpled in your hand and released, English gabardines have few or no wrinkles. They tend to be high priced ($40 to $60 per yard), but they are well worth the investment. When using the most tightly woven gabardines, like many of the English ones, there's no need to line them.

My next favorite gabardines are the Italians, which are usually finer and thinner. They drape beautifully with a '40s quality reminiscent of the slacks Katharine Hepburn wore, but they generally wrinkle more easily than the English gabs; they are best made into lined garments. Italian gabardines cost about the same as English ones.

There are some fine domestic gabardines, as well, and their prices tend to be lower than English or Italian ones. Their durability and drape are good, but the color range is limited compared to English or Italian gabardines, whose rich colors are so odd and wonderful.

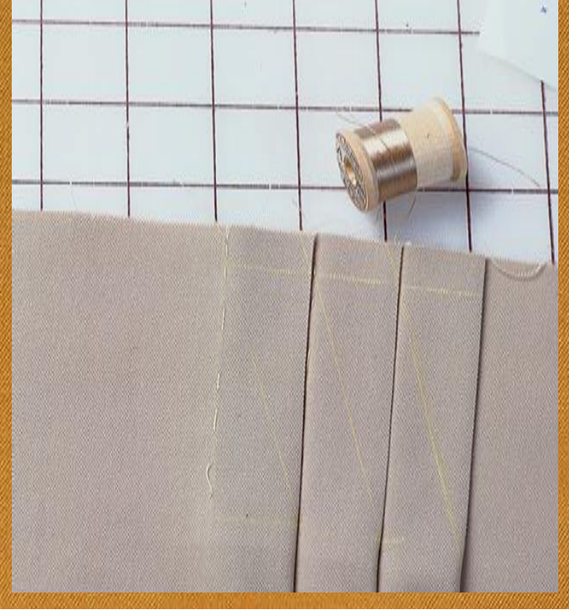
Speaking of colors to wear, here's my suggestion: Whether you're going to make a trenchcoat, a pair of pants, or a baggy shirt, look for a color that complements your eye color. Wear that color, and you will always look fabulous.

Matching weights to garments

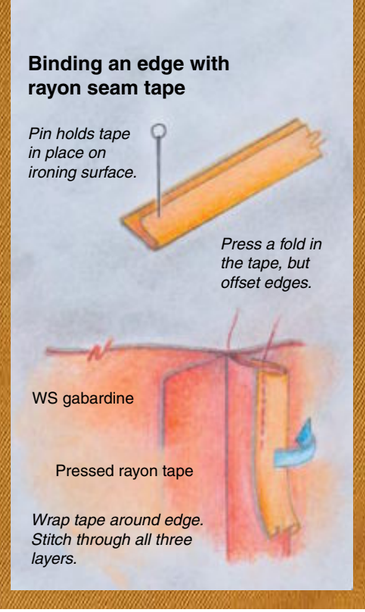
Generally, gabardine's character is well-suited to a tailored garment with clean, simple lines and no intricate detail. Pleats, darts, and plackets with topstitching are lovely details. Since gabardine is difficult to ease, use designs which have long, flowing lines and gentle curves, such as raglan sleeve coats and pleated slacks and trousers.

Gabardines come in light, medium, and heavy weights. Lightweight gabardine is good for full, loose, men's-style shirts with deep armholes, flat sleeve caps with little or no ease, and a one-piece collar. Full, pleated, drapey trousers (such as shown in the photo on p. 13), skirts with edgestitched pleats, and circle skirts hemmed to mid-calf also look great in lightweight gabardine. The raglan sleeve coat shown on the facing page required about 5 yards of fabric, yet it is light, warm, and durable in lightweight gabardine.

Medium-weight gabardines work well for casual jackets, straight skirts, trim trousers, and shawl-collared coats with slim lines. Heavyweight gabardines



Fusible tricot interfaces the waist area of a pair of pleated pants (above). The author removed tricot from each pleat overlap so only one layer of interfacing ends up in the final garment. In preparation for topstitching, the pleats were basted along the fold lines with silk thread (right), pinned across the bottom, and steamed and fingerpressed. The topstitching lines are marked with yellow chalk that can be easily brushed off.


Binding an edge with rayon seam tape
Pin holds tape in place on ironing surface.
Press a fold in the tape, but offset edges.
WS gabardine
Pressed rayon tape
Wrap tape around edge. Stitch through all three layers.

A binding of colored rayon seam tape is a simple, elegant finish for seam allowance edges.

make wonderful overcoats, outerwear in general, and hiking or riding pants.

Handwashing and preshrinking

An appealing characteristic of gabardine is that if you preshrink the fabric before construction, you can handwash unlined garments made from it, such as pants and shirts. I've found that pants with hair canvas interfacing in the waistband can be handwashed if the hair canvas was also shrunk before use. Garments that have fusible interfacings or attached linings must be dry cleaned. If you plan to have your garment dry cleaned, then simply send the yardage to the cleaners and request that they dry-clean, steam, and press it. This will ensure maximum shrinkage before the cloth is cut.

Here's the method I use to preshrink gabardine: I suggest you work with no more than three yards at a time since the wet fabric is so heavy. Half fill a bathtub with cold water and add two capfuls of a lingerie-washing liquid or high-quality hair shampoo that doesn't contain detergent or alcohol. (Alcohol acts like a solvent and will lift the color from your fabric.) Shampoos are meant to clean protein fibers, which is what wool is made up of.

Immerse the fabric, squeeze and swoosh water through it thoroughly for five to ten minutes (taking a rest every little while), then drain the tub. With the fabric still in the tub, half fill the tub once again with cold water, but don't add shampoo. Squeeze and swoosh water through the fabric for several minutes, drain the tub, and repeat the rinse.

To dry the fabric, fold it in half lengthwise and drape it on a rod set over the tub so the water drains directly into the tub. I have a rod set perpendicular to the curtain rod, with one end resting on the wall molding. Let the fabric drain overnight. Do not twist or wring the yardage, as this could set creases. The weight of the water draining out of your fabric will relax most of the wrinkles. Let the fabric dry thoroughly, then press it, using the method described under "Perfect gabardine pressing" on pp. 12–13.

Fusibles make sewing easy

Fusible interfacing and gabardine is a marriage made in heaven. You may sew in interfacing if you prefer, but fusibles make less work.

Types of interfacing—I use only two types of fusibles with gabardine—a medium-weight weft insertion and a tricot (a knit)—alone and in combination for just the right amount of firmness. Both are synthetics; the weft insertion adds more body to gabardine than tricot. I've tried using a fusible batiste, but it's too stiff.

For outer garments such as coats and jackets, I combine weft and tricot, since two layers of weft would be too heavy, and two layers of tricot, too light. I apply weft insertion to undercollars, collar bands, pocket and sleeve welts, and in a 4-inch-wide strip down the center-front edge. The weft stabilizes the fabric. I fuse tricot to the top collar, the facings, and to the hem facing. The tricot prevents the seam allowances in the collar and facing from showing.

Weft insertion would add too much body to a regular garment such as a shirt. I use only tricot and apply it to the cuffs, both the under and top collar, the front facing, and the front band.

For pants with a waistband, I apply weft insertion to the waistband. If I'm using lightweight gabardine and the pants don't have a waistband, I apply tricot to the body of the pants, as shown in the left photo above, and weft insertion to the facing. Bandless pants tend to roll without added body at the waist.

Non-bubble fusing—I use almost the same pressing method to apply fusible interfacing as I use for normal final pressing—a dry iron, mist of water, and a press cloth. Don't rely on a burst of steam supplied by an iron; the steam travels quickly though the porous fusible and stops short at the densely woven gabardine, causing unsightly bubbling and counteracting the fusing method. Always fuse from the garment's top to bottom with the lengthwise grain.

Working from the wrong side, mist the fabric lightly with a spray bottle. Lay the interfacing, glue side down, on the fabric. Mist the interfacing and pat in the moisture with your hands. Lay a press cloth over the interfacing and mist lightly. Then press and hold a hot, dry iron down on each press area for ten seconds. Do not slide the iron; that would squish the fusing agent instead of allowing it to penetrate the fabric. Continue pressing and holding until you have covered the entire area to be fused. Then repeat from the right side of the fabric.

Cutting, layout, and sewing

Gabardine is easy to cut and mark. For accuracy and speed, I use pattern weights instead of pins, and a rotary cutter rather than scissors. I cut one layer of fabric at a time to get the most accurate cut possible.

Some gabardines have a nap or a sheen one way and not the other way; sometimes it's hard to see, so use the pattern instructions for nap layout. After cutting and fusing, I use tailors' tacks, a chalk pencil, and a rotary chalk dust marker (such as a Chalkoner) for marking details like pleats and darts (see right-hand photo on the facing page).

Sewing seams is straightforward. I use sizes 10 to 14 sewing machine needles and 10 to 12 stitches per inch. For most sewing, I use a size 12 needle, but a size 10 is good for single layers. I use polyester or cotton-covered polyester thread; pure cotton tends to wear and fade, and silk thread stretches too much to use for construction.

Seam finishings

Gabardine is such a beautiful fabric that I finish seams with as little fuss as possible to maintain the drape and softness.

Rayon tape seam binding—My favorite way to prevent seam allowances from raveling is to bind the edges with a folded length of plain-woven rayon seam tape (photo and drawing above). Rayon seam tape is more flexible and softer than polyester, cotton, or self-fabric bias tape. Plain-woven tape in many different colors (select one that complements your fabric) is available by mail from tailors' suppliers such as Greenberg & Hammer, 535 Eighth Ave., New York, NY 10018.

A traditional Hong Kong finish (see *Basics*) or pinking is also a good way to finish raw edges. I never serge gabardine edges as it tends to create a ridge on the outside of the garment when the seams are pressed. However, if you must serge, I recommend wooly nylon thread to soften the outline of the thread lines.

Topstitching—The subtle detail of topstitching, placed as near to edges as possible, makes a perfect finish.

I admit that one of the reasons I've had successful topstitching is that I use an industrial sewing machine whose presser foot pushes firmly down on the fabric. Poor topstitching—with wavy lines or puckering—is usually the result of the two layers of fabric shifting under the foot as you stitch. Here's how you can topstitch well even if you don't have an industrial machine:

Topstitching essentially presses the seams, so don't overwork the gabardine by pressing the seam beforehand. Instead, fingerpress (see instructions on p. 12), then baste the seam area with silk thread to prevent the fabric layers from shifting at all.

If you have a straight-stitch foot (a presser foot with a small round hole), use it for topstitching. Common on older straight-stitch machines, this foot allows the fabric layers to move less from side to side during stitching than the zigzag foot that comes with newer machines. If you find it difficult to keep your topstitching even with the seam, try a topstitching foot. This foot has a vertical plate that lines up with an edge or ridge to help keep the topstitching even.

If you are topstitching a welt seam in which both seam allowances have been turned to one side, and the allowance nearest the garment is to be trimmed, keep the allowance at least ⅜ to ¼ in. wide. Anything smaller is too narrow and will form a ridge under the fabric that will distort the topstitching.

Hand-stitched finish—Handpicking (see *Basics*) along the edges of a collar and front opening, instead of topstitching, is a wonderful touch for an elegant, timeless look. Gabardine has such a smooth surface that the tiny pucker of each pick shows distinctly. Handpicking can be done when the garment is finished because the stitches don't go through the back layer. It's very unusual to see handpicking on garments these days, and it will make your gabardine treasure stand out in a crowd.

Shermane Fouché is a professional dressmaker and sewing instructor in San Francisco, CA. The patterns for the coat, shirt, and pants shown in this article are available from her at PO Box 410273, San Francisco, CA, 94141.

Perfect gabardine pressing

by Shermane Fouché

Gabardine is such a tightly woven fabric that it resists pressing. Yet it can also be overpressed and overworked to a shine, which is difficult to remove. There are a couple of tricks I use to make sure I press just enough. If I'm pressing a seam or detail, I always prepare the fabric by manipulating the area with steam and my fingers (fingerpressing), and perhaps basting. Then, when I'm sure I'm ready to do the final pressing, I use a *dry* iron with a mist of water and a press cloth and a clapper. This way I control the amount of moisture I use, instead of relying on the steam that the iron produces, which is usually not sufficient to press such a dense fabric well.

The basic pressing equipment I use is not fancy: a treated drill press cloth (available at many fabric stores and notions mail-order companies), a plant mister spray bottle available at hardware and dime stores, and an iron. The drill cloth placed over the gabardine protects it from shine and burn. Although I have a professional Naomoto iron that can supply plenty of constant steam, I don't use the steam option for final pressing.

My wooden clapper has a point presser attached (see the left-hand photo below). I also use a length of ¾-inch-diameter wooden dowel (right-hand photo below), available from hardware stores; and a seam roll and a sleeve board, both available from sewing stores and notions mail-order companies. A point presser has a narrow, flat edge that is generally narrower than the width of two seam allowances. When you use it to press open a seam, the seam allowance edges hang off the presser surface, so they aren't pressed into the fabric. Because the seam roll and the dowel have curved surfaces, they both can be used in the same way as the point presser.

Steaming, fingerpressing, and basting—If steamed briefly, wool gabardine becomes pliable and can be gently nudged and tapped into place in preparation for final pressing. To steam, just hold a steam iron about a half inch above the fabric; don't touch the surface. While the fabric is still warm and moist, I use my fingers to press the gabardine into shape. You can fingerpress seam allowances open, position the seam along a lapel or collar edge to the underside so the line of the seam won't show after final pressing, or flatten a dart.

Sometimes I baste after fingerpressing. Pleats can be basted into position along the fold lines with silk thread, which can be pressed yet won't leave any permanent stitch impressions in the fabric.

Final pressing—To crisply press seams or fabric, I work first from the back of the fabric. Lay the garment or fabric wrong side up over the ironing board or pressing surface, and spray a light mist of water over the area. Then lay the press cloth over the misted area and mist the press cloth. With a dry iron set on high (wool setting), use a press-and-lift, press-and-lift motion on the press cloth until you have covered the entire moistened area. Don't slide the iron over the surface (this is called ironing).

If you have a stubborn area that does not flatten with the described pressing method, press the area after each press-and-lift motion with a wooden clapper, as I'm demonstrating in the left-hand photo below.

To achieve a really smooth surface in uncut yardage, turn the fabric over and repeat the pressing procedure on the gabardine's right side. Pressing from the right side brings out the natural soft sheen of the lustrous wool gabardine.

Pressing seams—Gabardine needs firm pressing for crisp seams, but it's also easy to leave the impressions of seam allowance edges on the right side of the garment if you're not careful. Here's how to avoid marking the right side during final pressing.

First press with the seam allowances together to relax and set the stitches and the fabric together. Then open the allowances, fingerpress if you want, and lay the opened allowances on the point presser or seam roll. Press, using a press cloth, spray, and dry iron as recommended at left. For a very crisp press, lay the seam over the curve of a wooden dowel, as shown in the right-hand photo, facing page, and press.

Removing shine and creases—If you somehow go beyond lustrous to a flattened shine, you can remove the shine by using a steam iron. Mist the shiny area on the right side, hold your iron a half inch over the uncovered surface, and rush a burst of steam into the fabric. This should fluff the fibers and take away the shine, although you may now have to repeat the pressing procedure.

If the shine persists, you can brush the surface with short, soft brush-and-lift motions along the twill lines with a tailors' brush. This brush, available from tailors' suppliers, has outer bristles of hair and fine inner bristles of brass. It's 2½ by 3½ inches in size and is available for about $20. Shine up a scrap and test this brushing technique before you try it on your garment.

If you've put a crease where you don't want one, there's a way to remove it: Working from the back of the fabric, mist the creased area heavily, pat in the moisture evenly with a tailors' mitt, then hold a steam iron half an inch over the moistened area and steam. This will fluff the fibers, and you can then use the pressing method described above to re-press the area flat.

For a crisp, flat press, bear down firmly with a wooden clapper over a just-pressed area (left). The author's clapper is attached to a point presser, whose points she is using as handles. Above, an inexpensive wooden dowel makes an ideal pressing surface. Only the seam allowance gets pressed on the dowel's curve. (The press cloth normally used over the garment was removed for the photo.)

Lightweight gabardine is ideal for pants and shirts. The custom touch is large running stitches along the shirt's collar and opening edges. (Photo by Susan Kahn)

Next article to start on next page

A notch above

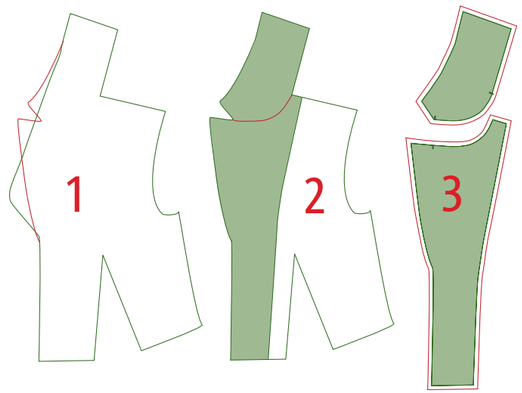
Get perfect, bulk-free lapels by mastering the pivot point first

Notched lapels are one of the hallmarks of good tailoring, and there's no reason to consider them impossible. The key to making a perfect notch is mastering the pivot point—on the inside corner where all of the collar and body pieces join.

In classic tailoring, you cut an under-collar piece to join to the body of the jacket, and an upper-collar piece to join to the facing. These four pieces are sewn together, and it gets tricky when they all meet at the pivot point.

Here are four ways to perfect your notches: Adapt your pattern to reduce the number of seams, frame your interfacing for bulk-free seams, lap and clip seam allowances at the crucial pivot point, and make a template for matching both lapel sides. From that point on, you can proceed with traditional or couture tailoring methods to finish your lapel and jacket.

Kenneth D. King creates couture garments for his clients in his Manhattan studio (KennethDKing.com).



Adapt your pattern

Simplify your sewing considerably by eliminating the seam that joins the under collar to the body.

By eliminating the thickness of the two seam allowances, you're free of the bulk that results when the upper collar, under collar, lapel, and facing seams come together. The collar-to-lapel seam is retained on the upper collar and facing piece for appearance only.

1. The easiest way to adapt your pattern is to start with a shawl collar style and reshape the lapel edge following a standard notched-lapel pattern.

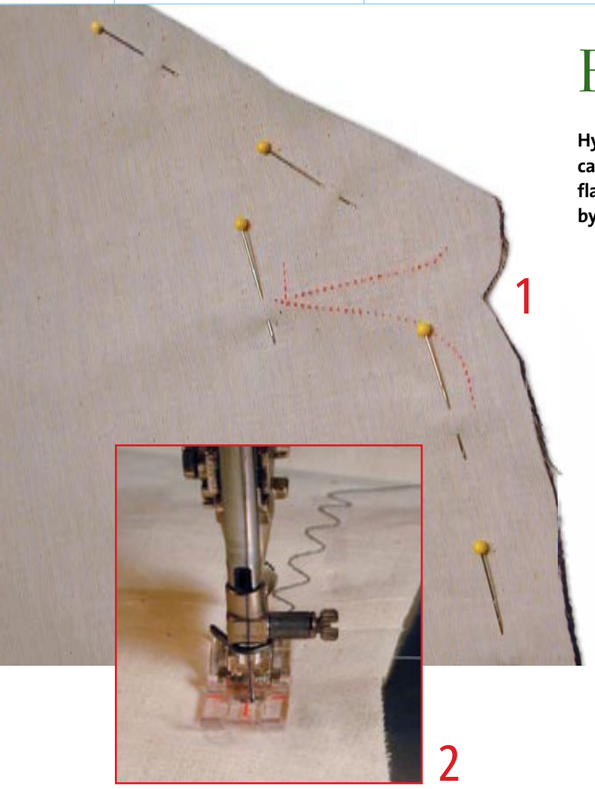
2. Draw a new facing pattern to match the edge, and draft a new notch seam.

3. Cut the pattern along the notch seam, and add seam allowances. The lapel edge on the jacket and facing pattern pieces should match.

Alternate method: Adapt a standard notched-lapel pattern by overlapping the adjoining seamlines on the under-collar and front-pattern pieces, and taping them together along the appropriate seamlines.

There are usually notches for aligning the under collar to the body seam. Use them to simplify joining the pattern pieces—it's that easy. I suggest making a muslin to check your pattern.

continued



1

2

Frame your interfacing

Hymo interfacing, or hair canvas, is stiffer than your fashion fabric. If you catch it into the seams, it causes trouble when you try to press the seams flat. I modify hair-canvas interfacing to keep it from making bulky seams by framing it with muslin or other lightweight fabric.

1. Start by cutting identical muslin and hair-canvas interfacing pieces from the pattern. Pin the pieces together, one on top of the other, so that their edges are perfectly aligned. Set up your machine for a serpentine stitch or a three-step zigzag at 5-mm width and 2-mm stitch length.

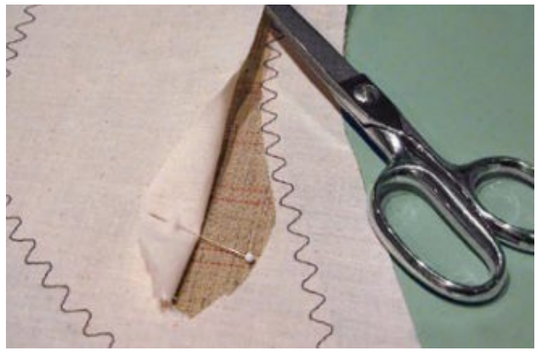
2. If you are working with a ⅝-inch seam allowance, position the cut edge of your work under your presser foot on the 1-inch mark of your stitch plate, and sew all the way around both the upper collar and lapel interfacings.

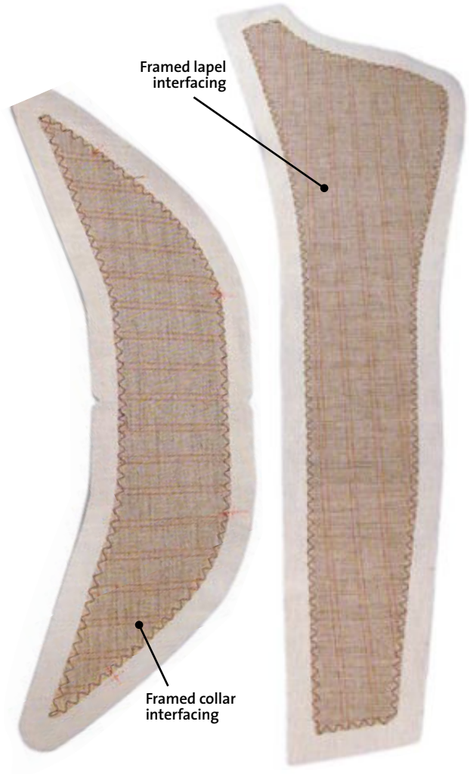
3. After you sew, cut off the seam allowance of the hair canvas close to the stitching.

4. Turn the piece over, and trim out the muslin inside the serpentine stitching, leaving its seam allowance as shown. The side with the muslin frame on top is the side that touches the wrong side of the fashion fabric.

3

4





Prepare the lapel facing

Cut the lapel-facing pieces from your fashion fabric. Lay them on the table, right side down.

1. Lay the lapel-interfacing pieces over the fashion-fabric pieces. Machine-baste along the seamline that joins the lining to the facing and along the shoulder seam.

Staystitch the neck seamline, stopping at the pivot point. Use silk thread in a contrasting color to tailor-baste the interfacing to the fashion fabric below the break. (Not shown)

2. Position a pressing pad along the roll line, fold the interfacing over the pad, and press it above the break.

2

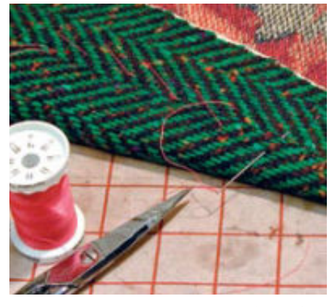
Photos: Kenneth D. King, from his electronic book, Tailored Jacket

3. Fold the fashion fabric over the interfacing, still on the pad, and press. You will see a little bit of the muslin peeking out around the edge from underneath. This process establishes the turn of cloth.

4. Use silk thread to tailor-baste the two lapel layers together while they're still on the pad to lock the turn of cloth in place for better construction later.

3

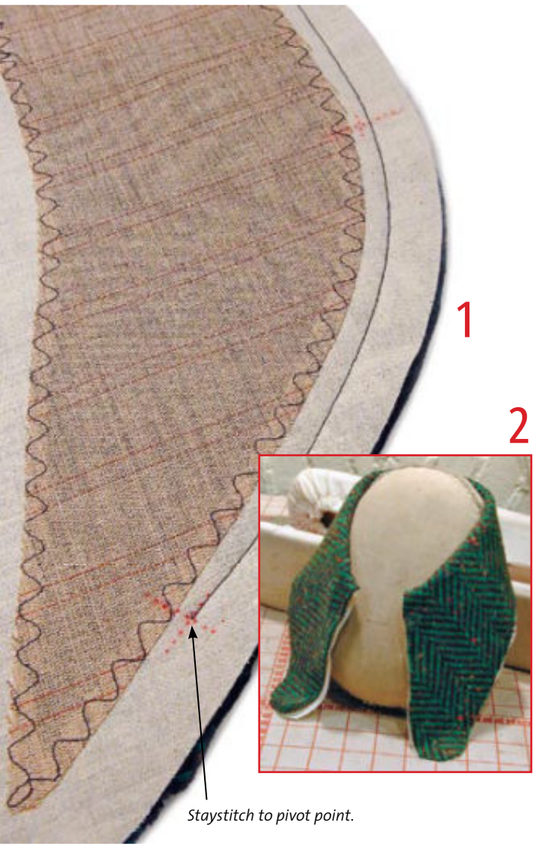
4



continued

Shape the upper collar; lap and clip the notch

Position the fashion-fabric upper-collar piece facedown on the table, and top with the matching interfacing piece, wrong sides together.

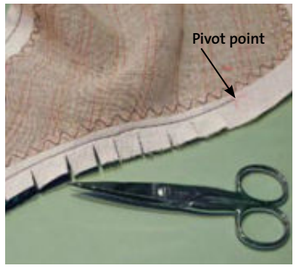


Staystitch to pivot point.

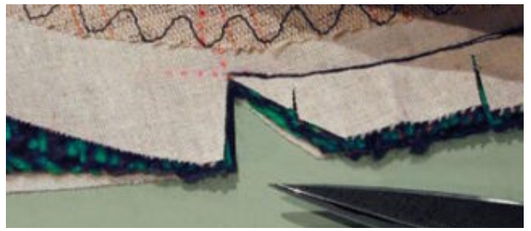
1. Staystitch the neck seam between the pivot-point marks. With the right side down, lay the upper-collar unit over a pressing ham and pin between the pivot points. Fold the interfacing piece along the neck roll line first. Then fold the fashion fabric over the interfacing to establish the turn of cloth.

2. Shape the collar around the ham, as shown, pin it in place, and steam with an iron. Keeping everything on the ham, baste through both layers around the outer edges of the collar to lock in the turn of cloth.

3. Clip the curve on the neck seam of the lapel-facing pieces, which you staystitched earlier. Match the pivot points of the upper collar to the lapel facings, pin the neck seams, and machine-sew.



4. Clip a 45-degree angle at the pivot points. Clipping the side notch seam removes the bulk, making construction easier later.



Make another clip at the ends of the seams where the lining seam intersects the notch seam.

5. Press the notch seam allowances open, and stitch them to the interfacing to keep them flat for construction later.

6. Lap the lapel-facing seam allowance over the collar seam allowance.

7. Make a cut through both seam allowances along a line extended from the edge to the pivot point.

8. The cut edges abut with no bulk. This makes this area lie flat, so constructing the notched lapel will be a breeze later.

Use a reversible template for symmetry

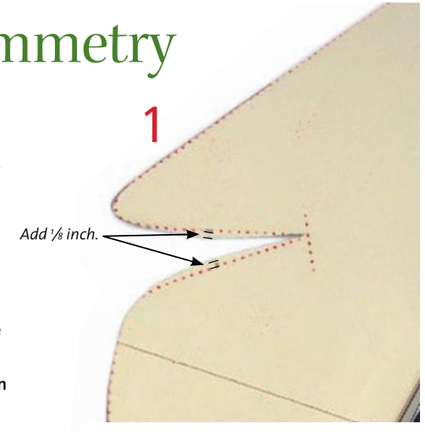
To ensure that both facings match, cut a template for the lapel to follow when stitching.

1. Trace the seamlines from the pattern onto a piece of tag board (a manila folder works fine). After tracing the notch, bow the notch lines by ⅛ inch to prevent the finished line from appearing to curve inward.

2. Before attaching the lapel facings, pin an ⅛-inch pinch of fabric on the upper collar, and tailor-baste around the pin to build in a little more favoring for the collar. This section is pressed flat later.

3. With right sides together, pin the lapel facing to the jacket body. Thread-baste with a matching color so that you won't have to remove the basting later.

4. Pin the template over the interfaced side, and machine-sew the facing by following the template edge. After sewing, grade the seams, clip curves, turn right side out, and press.



Sleuthing

THE WORLD OF

Ready-to-Wear

Tips and techniques for fit, form, and fashion from an industry expert

by Louise Cutting (from issue #104)

I have been out in the world with my spyglass again, picking up more tips from ready-to-wear, clues on fitting, and some tricks you'll be glad to have for your latest sewing projects. I like to snoop-shop in unusual stores and often find new and different garment accents right where the designer left them. In this article, I'll tell you about two pocket ideas to spice up your favorite standard patterns, a couple of button tricks, and tips for hems and even sewing. ♦

Louise Cutting owns a fabric store and a pattern line. She writes and teaches, and says she's in heaven wherever she is.

Hanging pocket updates favorite patterns

On a recent buying trip to New York City, I noticed that one particularly distinctive pouch pocket was showing up on garments everywhere– especially hanging off the front of an oversized knit top (in linen the same color as the knit)—and on the side seams of pants, below the knee. I think it's a simply wonderful design element that adds a dash of fun to a garment. Here's how to make it—adjust the proportions as you wish:

- For the pocket, cut a 1½-inch by 20¾-inch piece from the fashion fabric.
- Cut two 1¼-inch by 11½-inch strips of lightweight interfacing, to give your fabric moderate body.
- Fuse an interfacing strip to the wrong side of the pocket, parallel to and 1¼ inches from each short end.
- Fold the pocket in half crosswise, wrong side out. Sew a narrow seam at each end, perpendicular to the fold, to form a pouch. Trim the seam allowances diagonally at the corners on the fold. Press the seam open over a point presser.
- Serge-finish the open edge of the pocket; turn a 1¼-inch hem to the wrong side, and press. Insert double-sided fusible basting tape (such as Steam-a-Seam) under the fold and as close as possible to the serged edge; press again to secure.
- Straight-stitch the hem 1 inch from the top fold. Turn the pocket right side out and press flat.
- The pockets I saw were sewn to the garment with a 1-inch square reinforced with an "X" at each corner; the top edge was not spread taut, but was allowed to drape. This is personal preference; the pockets could be sewn flat to the garment and/or at an angle to the straight grain.

Crepe with shape

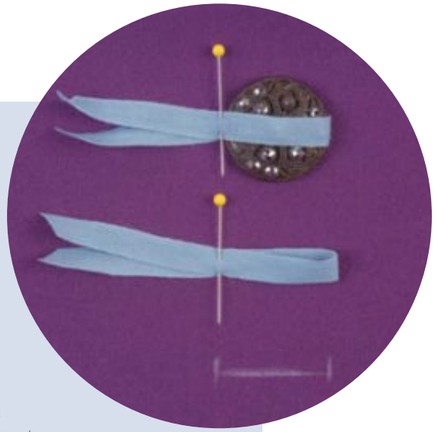
To maintain wool crepe's attractive soft characteristics, completely underline it with sew-in 100-percent cotton batiste. Then apply the appropriate weight fusible interfacing to the batiste rather than the wool crepe. This eliminates drop-off lines where the interfacing starts and stops on the crepe and maintains the fabric's original hand.

Facing-framed pocket opening

I've recently seen what might be the world's fastest slash pocket—it's simply a faced slit, with the facing turned to the right side of the garment, completed with a pocket-size patch positioned behind the slit and topstitched into place. Put your design skills to work selecting fabrics, and shaping and stitching the facing and patch. To make this pocket:

- Decide the shape of the facing and pocket patch and cut a piece of fashion fabric for each. Mark the pocket slash line on the facing.
- Position the pocket patch on the wrong side of your garment and mark its position. Remove the patch. Mark the slash line for the pocket opening on the wrong side of the garment.
- Staystitch the facing ¼ inch from the raw edges. Press the raw edges to the wrong side along the stitching.
- Position the right side of the facing against the wrong side of the garment, aligning the slash placement lines. Starting on one long side, sew around the slash line with short stitches; sew two stitches when you pivot across each end. (Never start and stop stitching at an end; it's the weakest section of the opening.)
- Place the garment facing-side up on the ironing board, and cut along the line between the stitches, cutting up to but not through the two stitches at each end.
- Turn the facing through the opening to the right side of the garment, and press. Use double-sided fusible basting tape to affix the facing to the garment.
- Topstitch around the opening. Edgestitch the facing to the garment. If you like, embellish the facing with decorative stitching.
- Serge-finish the outside edges of the patch, and position it right side down on the wrong side of the garment where you marked the placement; hold the edges in place with double-sided basting tape. Edgestitch the patch in place.

Three ways to button it up



To find the perfect buttonhole size to fit a button, wrap a piece of narrow twill tape around the button, including the shank, and mark the length. Half that length is the buttonhole size.

The most important button position is the one on the bust point line. Mark buttonholes and button positioning when the garment is close to being finished, right before sewing the buttonholes.

To decide exactly where your bust point is, drop a measuring tape from where the shoulder seamline and neck edge meet, letting it fall over your bust. The point where the tape falls away from the body is your bust point. The buttonhole should be placed perpendicular to this point at the center front. Equally space the rest of the buttonholes above and below this location.

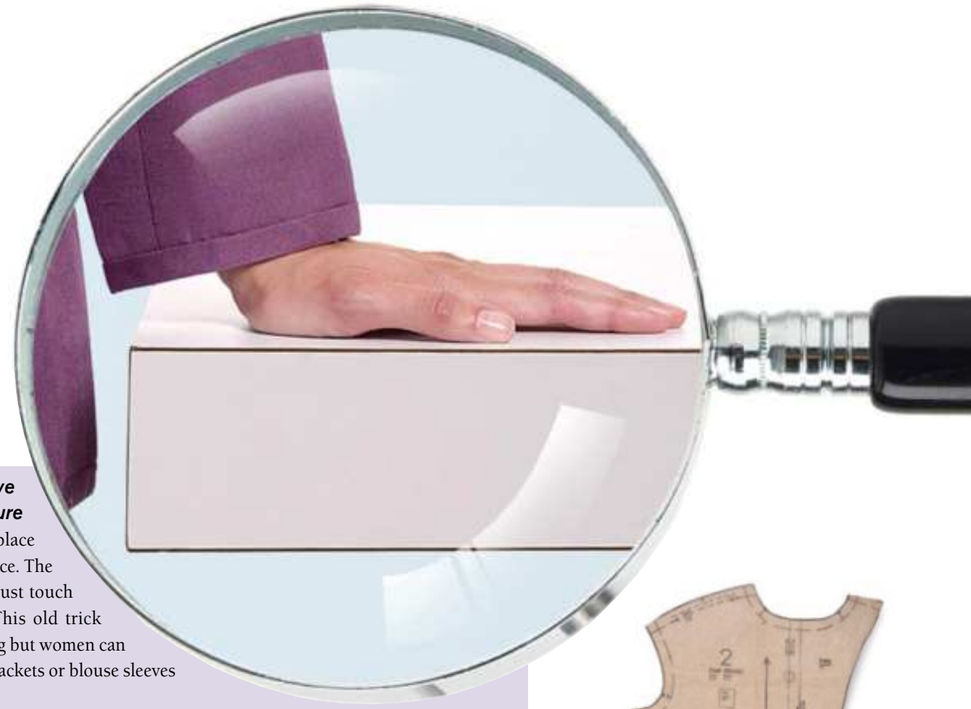
You will be able to unbutton your blouse or jacket down to this point and not look risqué! The turn of the cloth at the left and right of the garment will be high enough to cover the front of your bra, and this line is always flattering to the face.

Try arranging buttons in groups of two or three instead of using a traditional row of single buttons running down the front of a dress or blouse. This creates an interesting fashion detail—or is a great button solution for "gaposis." When ready-to-wear garments have poor button placement at the bust, add another one or two buttonholes in line with the original buttonholes. The new buttonholes can match the size of the originals and serve a set of new same-size buttons, or you can size them to fit mismatched buttons from your collection.

Two smart notions

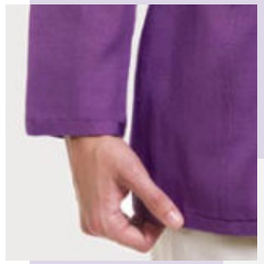
When snaps no longer stay snapped, renew their grippers with clear nail polish. Coat both of the snap pieces, let the polish dry, and then try the snap. Continue to apply the polish until the snap holds securely.

Never store out-of-season clothes with metal buttons in plastic dry-cleaning bags. The buttons will discolor by the next season. Plastic bags omit gases that eat the metallic coating off the buttons.



Four rules for jacket and sleeve hems

The traditional sleeve hemline is easy to figure out: Stand by a table and place your palm flat on the surface. The end of the sleeve should just touch the back of your hand. This old trick comes from men's tailoring but women can use it for their traditional jackets or blouse sleeves that don't have cuffs.



Set the bottom hemline on a traditional tailored jacket according to your arm length. When you stand with your arms straight at your sides, the bottom of the finished jacket should touch the palm of your cupped hands, and your fingers should be able to wrap around the hem as shown at left.

Hem sleeves to flatter your figure. To emphasize your bust, hem your sleeve right at the bustline—the strong horizontal line will make your bust appear to be the widest part of your upper body. To draw attention away from your bust, place the hemline above or below it.

Taper sleeves slightly at the wrist for the most flattering silhouette. The wrist circumference on long-sleeved tailored jackets in ready-to-wear is usually 10–11 inches at the hem. Patterns are more likely to measure 11½–12 inches at the hem. This extra fabric hangs at the widest part of your hips and makes them appear wider.

Model photos: Jack Deutsch; makeup: Susanna Perks; all other photos: Sloan Howard

Graph the math

Use graph paper to lengthen a pattern piece. The ¼-inch grid tablets are great guides for evenly spacing the split when lengthening patterns. The tablets come in several sizes and can be purchased at office supply stores. While there, pick up a roll of removable Magic Tape (in the bright royal blue box). It can be peeled off tissue paper, but don't get an iron near it.

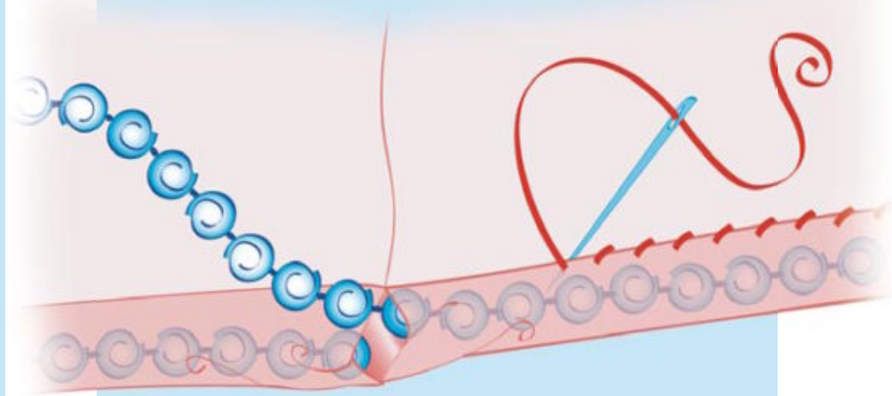
Next article to start on next page

12 Terrific Finishing Tips from the Pros

The Professional Association of Custom Clothiers shares strategies for finishing your garment edges

(from issue #117)

1. To keep a skirt with godets falling beautifully, **add weight to the hem** with a ball chain—the kind used as a pull cord on light fixtures. It's lighter and more fluid than drapery weights, and is available at hardware stores. Sew bias binding inside the hem and thread the ball chain through it.

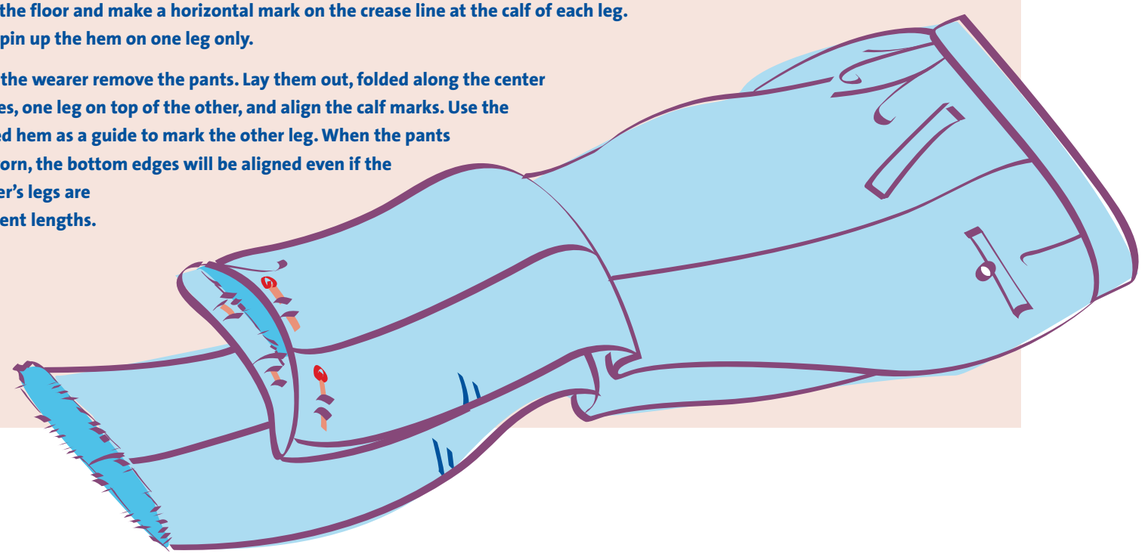


2. For **a long, uninterrupted line of hand stitches,** such as hand topstitching or blanket stitching, cut a thread twice the usual length, and start it in the center of the stitching line. Then, work one thread end right to left, and the other end left to right.

3. Hand-stitched hems with dimples that show on the right side of the satin can ruin a dress. For an absolutely **invisible satin hem,** underline the garment with silk organza and then hand-sew the hem through the underlining only.

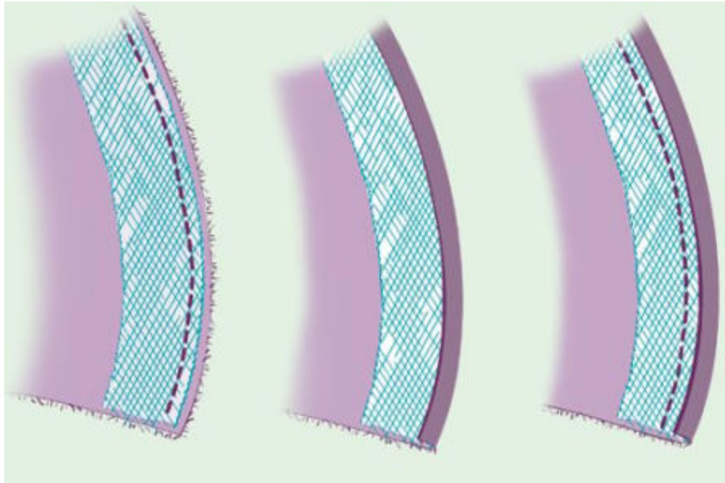
4. For an easy and accurate way to **mark a pants hem,** measure 12 inches up from the floor and make a horizontal mark on the crease line at the calf of each leg. Then pin up the hem on one leg only.

Have the wearer remove the pants. Lay them out, folded along the center creases, one leg on top of the other, and align the calf marks. Use the pinned hem as a guide to mark the other leg. When the pants are worn, the bottom edges will be aligned even if the wearer's legs are different lengths.



5. Hand-basted mitered bindings are definitely worth the time. Make the miter in the binding first and baste the binding in position. Then machine-stitch, starting at the miter, along one edge; return to the miter to stitch the other edge.

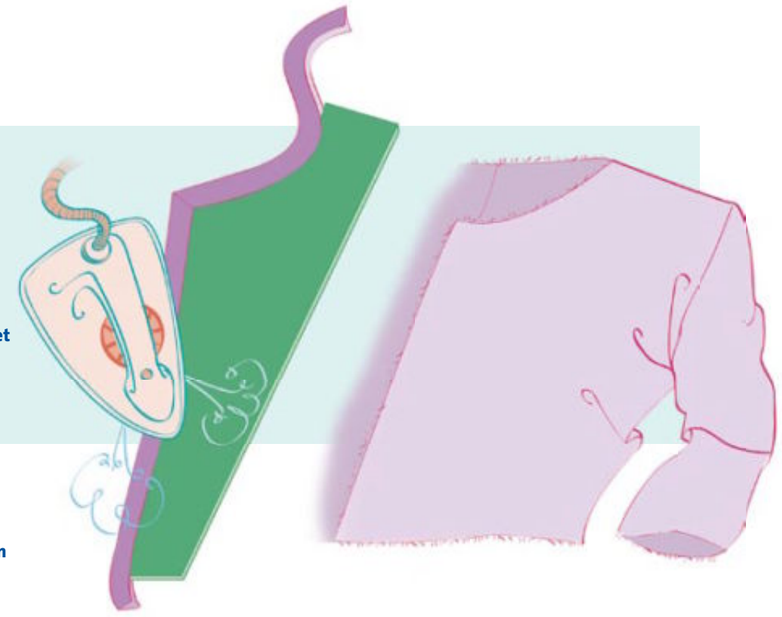
6. Keep a stash of bias strips handy. Cut 1- to 1¼-inch-wide pieces of leftover silk chiffon, china silk, and silk charmeuse, and store them in a plastic box. When you want to bind a hem or seam allowance, just select a strip in a coordinating color and sew it on.



7. Horsehair braid keeps your hem from looking limp. Here's what to do: Lay the horsehair braid on the right side of the skirt, aligning the raw edge of the skirt with the edge of the horsehair that doesn't have the pull string. With the horsehair on top, sew ⅛ inch from the skirt edge.

Turn the horsehair to the wrong side of the skirt, folding the fabric so it wraps the edge of the horsehair. Topstitch from the right side, ¼ inch from the turned edge. Draw up the pull string as needed so the horsehair hugs the inside of the skirt.

8. Binding a pointed lapel takes a bit of fussing, but if you shape the binding first it will be easier to sew. Cut a thin cardboard template the shape of your lapel (without seam allowances) and steam-press the binding over it to set the shape.

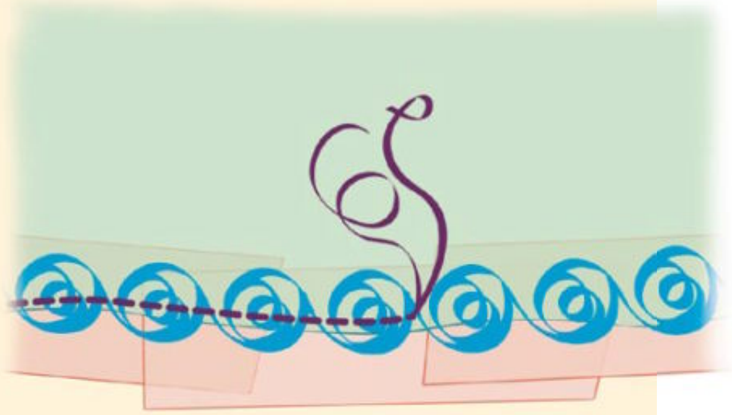


9. Make the **hems on knit garments** deep or they'll roll to the right side. Make the bottom hem at least 1¼ inches deep, and sleeve hems 1 inch deep.

10. If you have a garment that creeps up while you're wearing it, **add weight to the hem with pennies or dimes** stitched into little pockets of fabric you have sewn just for this purpose.

11. For a fast and attractive **edge finish on satin,** make a very flat, very tiny, turned-and-topstitched hem—carefully sewn and not stretched.

12. Use strips of **tissue paper** as a **stabilizer** when sewing trim or lace to a bridal veil or net overskirt—you'll have no problem with distortion or ripples. Put a strip of tissue in your machine, position the netting, and then place the trim on top. Topstitch together, sliding another strip of tissue into position when you reach the end of the first. Tear off the tissue when you're through. If your net and trim are white, use colored tissue so you can see what you're doing.



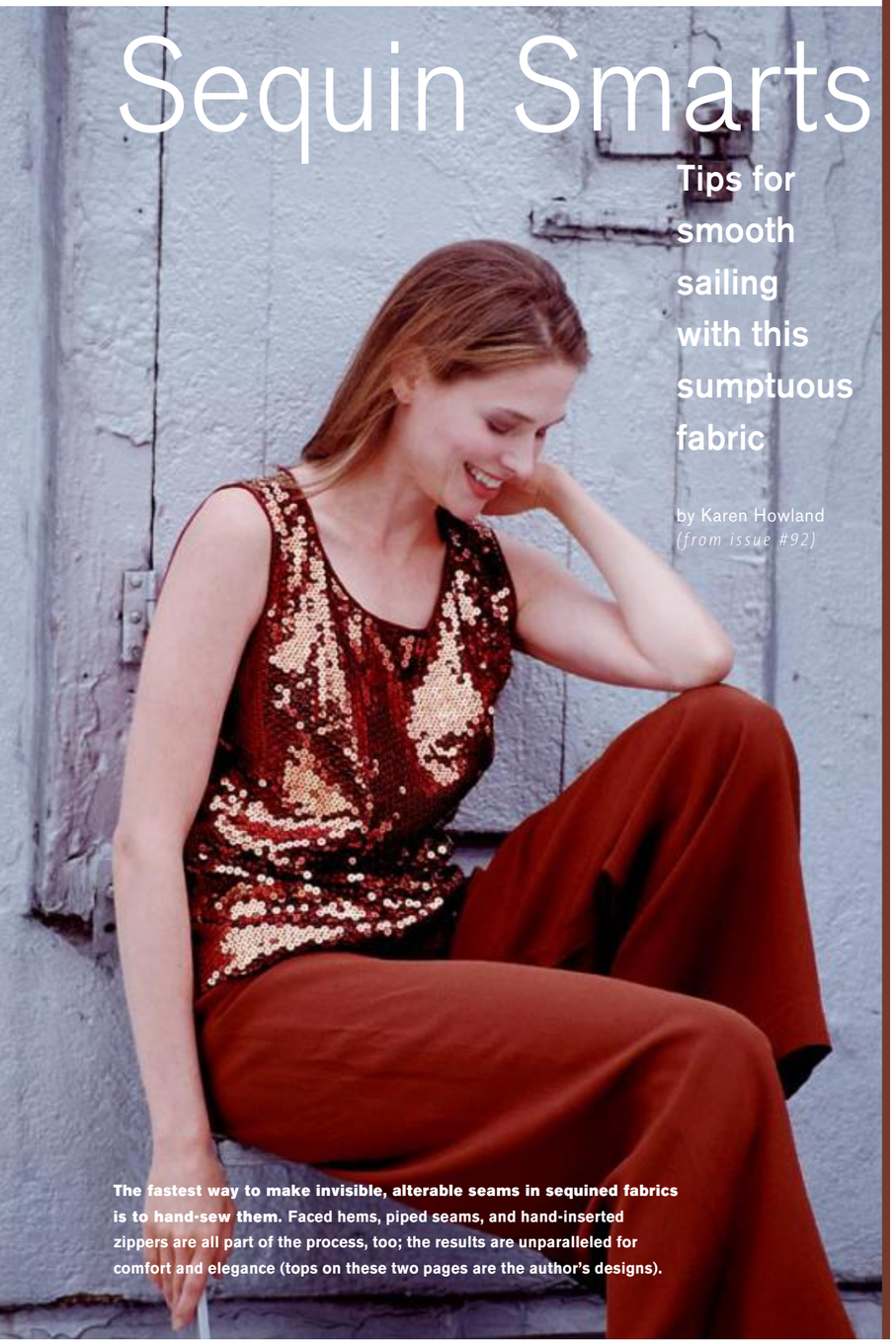
Drawings: Carol Ruzicka

PACC members who contributed to this article: Ruth Ciemnoczolowski, Barbara Callahan, Tina Cecil, Donna Lentz-Lickliter, Leslie Littell, Mary McNulty, Pamela Ptak, Colleen Schoneveld, Pamela Stewart, Sue Tenney, Terri Tipps, Gina VanderWal, Virginia Wentworth, Sharon Zydiak.

Sequin Smarts

Tips for smooth sailing with this sumptuous fabric

by Karen Howland
(from issue #92)



The fastest way to make invisible, alterable seams in sequined fabrics is to hand-sew them. Faced hems, piped seams, and hand-inserted zippers are all part of the process, too; the results are unparalleled for comfort and elegance (tops on these two pages are the author's designs).

When you're making prom dresses and wedding gowns for a living, you need to be able to smile when your client says, "I want sequins!" Here are a few of the techniques that keep me sane when sequin-covered fabric is the order of the day.

Sequin basics

Given the effort it takes to sew sequins, it's not worth it to work on second-rate fabrics, so before you buy, check the quality of the backing fabric (it should be strong and evenly woven or knit silk or polyester), the quality of the sequins (avoid cheap-looking, fragile sequins), and how the sequins are sewn to the backing fabric (avoid chain-stitched fabrics—you can't easily remove single sequins from these).

Cut and fit the lining before cutting the sequined fabric. Make the sequined layer of the garment slightly bigger than the lining, so the lining, not the sequined layer, will take the strain of wear. Use a single-layer layout when cutting. Sequined fabric has a "nap"; the sequins overlap each other from top to bottom. The nap, or smooth direction, should run from the top down on your garment. Cut with a sharp rotary cutter with the fabric face down. Keep a vacuum sweeper handy while cutting and working with sequined fabric, and clean your work area frequently. Before leaving the work area, thoroughly vacuum yourself, including the bottom of your shoes, or by the time you finish the project, scratchy sequins will have found their way into the rest of your house. Do not iron or apply heat of any kind near sequins. Press the lining before attaching it, because that will be your last chance. Use sew-in interfacings only.

Model photo: Jack Deutsch; hair and makeup: Susanna Perks

Detail photo: David Page Coffin; mannequin photo: Sloan Howard; illustration: Christine Erikson

Hand-sewn seams really are faster!

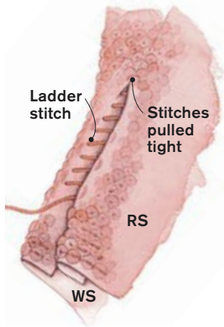
The traditional method for seaming sequins is to remove the sequins in the seam allowances and just beyond, machine-stitch using a zipper foot, then cover the seamline with sequins hand-sewn back in place one at a time. I've discovered that if you are willing to stitch all the seams by hand, you won't need to remove or replace any sequins, except at the tips of darts, as I'll describe in a moment, and the work will go much faster. This method is also somewhat alterable, since most of the fabric isn't damaged.

As you can see in the drawing at right, the basic technique is simple: With wrong sides together and the seam allowances folded at the seamlines and tucked in between the two layers, stitch using a very loose ladder stitch. About every 1½ inches, stop, and pull the stitches up tight on the previous section. When the stitches are tight, the sequins at the seamline will merge together, flattening out the folds and completely concealing the stitches. Take a few stitches in place to lock the seam at this point, then proceed with very loose stitches for a few more inches, pull up, and repeat.

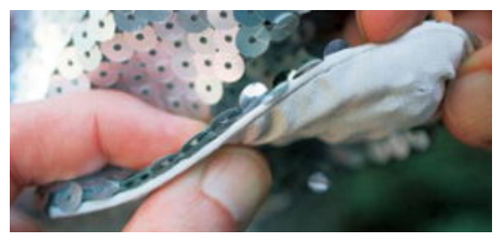
For darts, remove the sequins in the seam allowances wherever there is less than 1 inch of total dart seam allowance, which may be the entire dart length on narrow darts. Don't cut the thread that attaches each sequin. Instead, snip the sequin, then pry out the remaining half, so you don't compromise neighboring sequins. Cut along the dart centerline only where, and if, the dart width is greater than 1 inch. In any case, stitch the dart closed by hand, so you can get right to the tip, then sew single sequins back over the tip and any areas where sequins are visibly missing, using a matching thread. I avoid using invisible nylon threads, because they're too hard to handle.

TO HAND-STITCH SEQUINED SEAMS

Fold under seam allowances and place fabrics WSs together, then join with a loose ladder stitch, only pulling stitches tight after every 2 inches or so of seam. This will merge the sequins and flatten the fabrics.



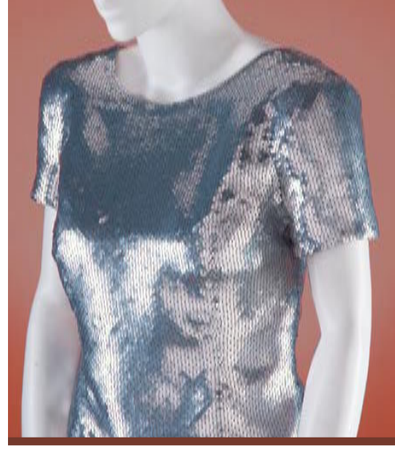
Piped edges equal comfort: Machine-sew a narrow piping to the outer fabric, then hand-sew the lining to the piping (see the full garment at top right).



Linings, facings, hems, and zippers

A sequined garment should be lined to protect the wearer from the sequins in the seam allowances, to support the hand-sewn seams, and to prevent snagging the threads holding the sequins in place. The outer edges of a sequined garment need to be handled in a way that retains the beauty of the fabric and is comfortable for the wearer—since small circles of sharp plastic are involved, the discomfort potential is significant.

Necklines and armholes can be bias-bound in the usual ways, as shown on the facing page, either before lining, or after lining and including the lining in the binding. I machine-stitch the binding to the right side right through the sequins, then hand-catch the binding's inside edge to the backing or lining fabric.



A less obtrusive method is to pipe the edges, allowing the sequins to extend right to the edge, but providing a significant separation between skin and sequins, as shown in the photo below. To form a fine piping, cover sport yarn with a bias strip of fabric. Remove the sequins in a ⅛-inch-wide swath at the stitching line, baste the piping in place, then stitch it by machine. Hand-sew sequins over the seamline, allowing a small amount of the piping to show, and hand-sew the lining in place.

For hems, cut a facing 2½ inches wide, then use a 2-inch bias maker to turn under ½ inch on both long edges of the facing. Turn the hem up and baste it in place, then remove the sequins in the hem for ¼ inch above the fold. Place the facing over the hem and slipstitch it in place close to the fold of the hem, then slipstitch the upper edge to the garment or lining.

Both lapped and invisible zippers work well in sequined garments. Turn back the seam allowance, and hand-sew it in place. It's a nice touch to add a zipper guard behind the zipper. And, of course, hand-stitch it in place! ♦

Karen Howland writes and teaches in Chillicothe, Ill.

Vent First

Simplify construction of a classic two-piece jacket sleeve

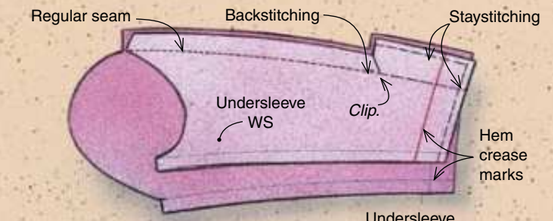
by Shirley McKeown

(from issue #38)

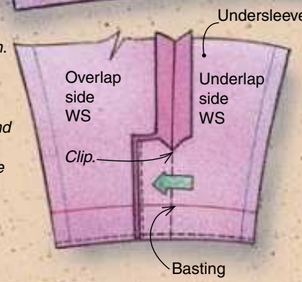
Simplify sleeve construction

Two-piece sleeve construction steps

1. *Stitch to the dot at the vent opening and backstitch, then machine baste from dot to hem. Clip the first basting stitches at the backstitching on both sides.*



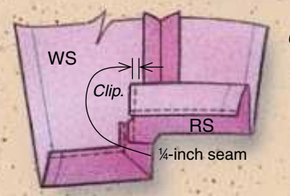
2. *Press the seam open over a ham. Clip into the dot on the seam allowance of the underlap side and press the vent facing toward the overlap side.*



3. *Remove the vent basting.*

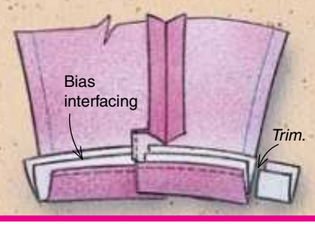
4. *Restore hem creases to both sides separately.*

5. *Miter the vent overlap.*

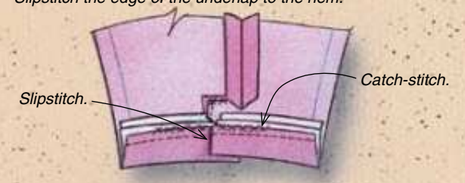


6. *Finish the underlap by turning the hem to the right side and stitching a ¼-inch seam to the top of the hem. Above the hem, clip to the staystitching, turn hem, and press.*

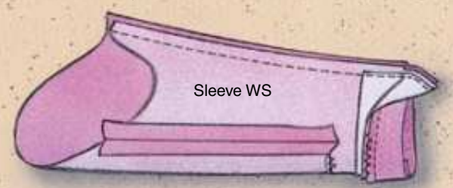
7. *Cut a bias strip of woven interfacing 2 inches longer than the hem and twice the hem width plus ¾ inch apart, and slip into the hem on each side, trimming the ends even with the unsewn seam allowances. Sew buttonholes if desired.*



8. *Catch-stitch vent and hem through all layers, catching the wrong side of the fashion fabric or the underlining, and leaving 3 inches unfinished at each end. Leave enough thread behind to finish the catch stitching in step 10. Slipstitch the edge of the underlap to the hem.*

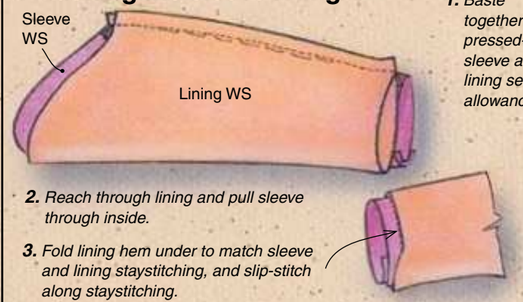


9. *Sew buttons to the vent through all layers. Suggested placement: First button 1 inch from the hem edge and ⅛ inch from the vent opening. Each additional button; ⅛ inch above the last.*



10. *To complete the sleeve, open the hem and interfacing and match hem creases. Start at the hem and sew to the underarm. Trim the interfacing from the seam allowances and press the seam open. Restore the hem crease, then trim away half of the seam allowance inside the hem. Press, then finish catch-stitching the hem.*

Attaching the sleeve lining



1. *Baste together pressed-open sleeve and lining seam allowances.*

2. *Reach through lining and pull sleeve through inside.*

3. *Fold lining hem under to match sleeve and lining staystitching, and slip-stitch along staystitching.*

Illustrations by Clarke

The traditional method of making two-piece jacket sleeves is to complete them (after confirming the fit, usually with a muslin) by finishing the seams, vents, hems, and sometimes even the linings, before they're attached. This saves wear, avoids wrinkling of the jacket during construction, and makes the process easier as well, by allowing you to do as much as possible while the sleeve is flat—while only one of the two seams is finished. (If your pattern doesn't have two-piece sleeves, see "Drafting a two-piece sleeve" on pp. 32–33.)

For some reason, tailoring methods have always advocated sewing the seam that doesn't include the vent first, as in the drawing above. I've discovered that if you start with the vent seam instead, the job becomes easier still, because you don't have to finish the vent within the small opening of the closed sleeve. The process I use is shown in full on the facing page. Here's a brief rundown of the steps involved:

Constructing the sleeve

To prepare the sleeve pieces, first make sure when you cut them out that both vent openings have cut-on facings, as in the drawings shown here. If your pattern doesn't have them, they can be added easily. Typical ones are shown in the last drawing on p. 33. Press the hems in place on all four pieces; I use a hem gauge, like Dritz's Ezy-Hem. Next, staystitch the hem and vent edges at ¼ inch, and the underarm at ½ inch on the undersleeve section. If you're using an underlining, apply the sleeve underlining pieces to the wrong side of the sleeve pieces before staystitching, then press.

I stitch the seam with the vent from top to bottom, switching to my maximum stitch size at the dot that marks the start of the vent, to baste the vent closed. I clip the vent facing on the undersleeve so I can fold the facing over to form the underlap, then finish both vent corners, forming the hem. I miter the overlap corner so there's no seamline at the edge (see ***Tips***, issue no. 38, p. 18) but I seam the underlap corner. A bias fold of compatible woven interfacing, called a hem roll, fits easily into the pressed sleeve hem and, with the use of a hem gauge and steam iron, can be made to take whatever curve the jacket sleeve hem may have. The edges of the two layers of interfacing and the hem are graded to keep the hem from showing on the right side of the sleeve.

At this point I catch-stitch all layers to the outer fabric. I sew on the buttons, and the vent is complete. Next I stitch the remaining seam, and finally make and attach the lining, as described below.

This method is a perfect example of the concept of unit construction, in which all the parts of one section of a garment are completed before attaching it to or adding another section. When organized like this, a pleasant task becomes an enjoyable one.

Adding the lining

Prepare the sleeve lining (cut 1 inch shorter than sleeve) by staystitching the hem at ¼ inch and the sleeve cap at ½ inch, then stitch both seams. With finished sleeve and sleeve lining wrong sides out, place the corresponding undersleeve and lining together, matching the two seams. Stitch their lengthwise seam allowances together by hand with long, loose running stitches beginning and ending 3 inches from the hem and armhole. Reach through the lining, grab the sleeve vent area, and pull it back through the lining so the hem is enclosed within the end of the lining, as in the last drawing above.

Attach the lining hem to the sleeve hem by folding under the ¼-inch staystitching line on the lining hem and pinning it to the staystitching line of the fashion fabric hem. The extra lining fabric will create the 'drop' in the lining at the sleeve hem. Slip-stitch the lining to the sleeve hem all around.

Turn the sleeve right side out, and the lining should drop into place. The sleeve is now completely finished and ready to attach to the jacket.

Shirley McKeown has taught clothing construction at G Street Fabrics in Maryland for the past 10 years.

Drafting a two-piece jacket sleeve from a one-piece pattern

by Margaret Komives

It's well known that two-piece sleeves have a much better shape than one-piece sleeves. The extra seam is an added shaping opportunity for the patternmaker, and also offers the tailor twice as many seams to adjust for a better fit. In my tailoring classes I recommend that students start with patterns that feature two-piece sleeves. But all too often they arrive with a one-piece sleeve pattern—either because they liked everything else about the pattern, or because they just didn't notice.

Whatever the reason, if you've got a one-piece sleeve pattern, with a little patience and some judgement you can draft a two-piece pattern from it. It is not an exact technique by any means and personal preference enters in, but the results I've gotten with the following methods have been very satisfactory.

Why not just use the sleeve pattern from another jacket? Unfortunately, that would require using the armscye from the other pattern, too, and transferring the armscye (which usually involves three body pieces) is a far more tricky job than redrawing the sleeve.

There are two types of one-piece sleeves. There's the usual centered-underarm sleeve, shown on the facing page, and then there's the sleeve, shown in the drawings at right, that has the seam offset toward the back of the underarm so that when it's sewn, it gives the appearance of a two-piece sleeve and can even have a vent. This type is the easiest to convert so I'll cover it first.

Converting the offset-seam sleeve

Always begin by pressing the pattern. Then draw a line through the underarm mark (which all American-made patterns have) parallel to the grainline and the length of the pattern. Next, draw a line two inches away from and parallel to this line toward the front of the sleeve, from seamline to hemline.

In the elbow area which lies in the center of the section usually marked "Ease" on the pattern, measure and mark ½ inch to ¾ inch away from the second drawn line on each side. Draw identical curved lines from seamline to hemline through the marked points, either with a curved ruler, or following a favorite two-pieced sleeve pattern, or by your own experienced hand. These will be stitching lines, so mark them as such.

Cut the pattern on the curved lines and add a ⅝-inch seam allowance to each. It should be easy to line up these seams later if you're careful to mark the upper and lower ends as in the last drawing on the facing page. That's all there is to it.

Before you move on, check the sleeve width at the hemline. Many jackets come with a sleeve that is much too wide at the wrist. Measure a favorite jacket for reference. I recommend about ten inches for a size 12, six inches on the upper sleeve, four inches on the undersleeve. You can narrow the wrist by redrawing the vent seamlines: take half the distance (usually about 2 inches overall) off on each side by tapering the seams in gradually from the armscye to the elbow, then taper a little more severely from elbow to wrist.

It's always a good idea to cut a test garment to check for drape, fit, etc. Make sure the vent lies in a good location, not too far to the front, nor underneath, where those lovely buttons won't show. In a size 12 there should be about two inches from the underarm line to the vent placement line. If the vent falls too far underneath, add to the undersleeve and take off from the upper, keeping a nice curve in the process.

Converting symmetrical sleeves

The symmetrical sleeve with the seam at the underarm, as shown at left, is much more common. The procedure for converting it is slightly more complex, but it's not difficult.

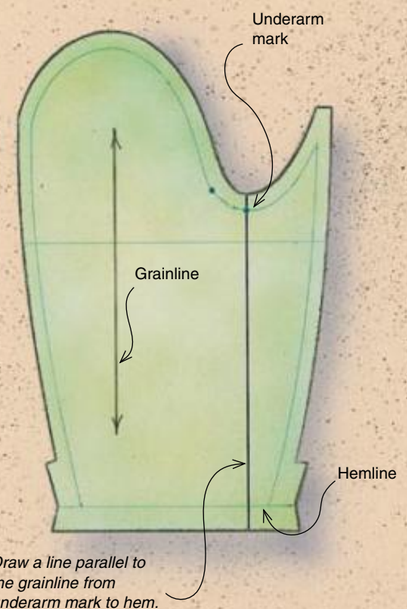
Begin by tracing the pattern without seam allowances. Trace off the stitching lines, darts, grainline, and any other important marks the pattern indicates. If it's a multisize pattern, draw in the stitching lines by measuring ⅝ inch in from the cutting line for your size. Cut the pattern on the stitching lines.

The drawings at left show the procedure. Basically, we're cutting off the side seams and piecing them together to make up an undersleeve pattern piece, then drawing new seams. Occasionally you'll encounter a pattern so narrow at the bottom that the vertical lines you need to make the cuts (see Step 2) hit the existing side seams before reaching the hem. If only one line hits a side seam, don't do anything. If both lines hit, add tissue so you can redraw the side seams wide enough for the vertical lines to reach the hem.

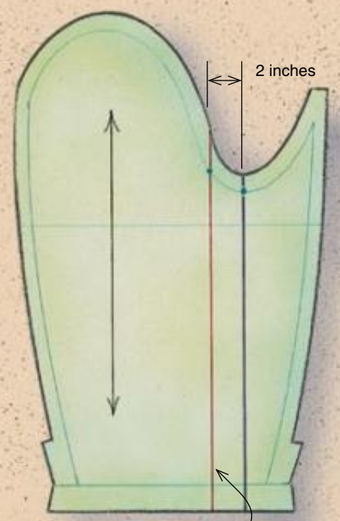
When you draw the back seam on the upper sleeve piece (see Step 3), you can add ⅝ inch to its length to create ease. You can add this length to the pattern in the previous procedure, too, but you'll have to redraw the hemline on the upper sleeve piece. The width of the sleeve at the hemline can also be corrected, as described above.

Margaret Komives is a frequent contributor to Threads.

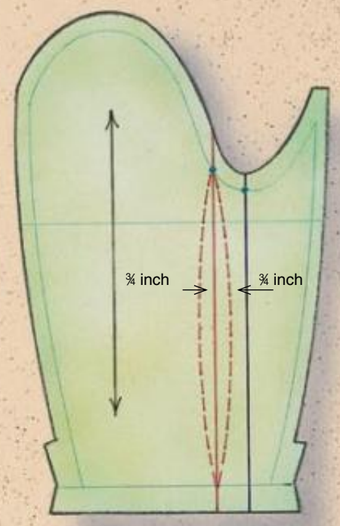
Converting offset-seam sleeves



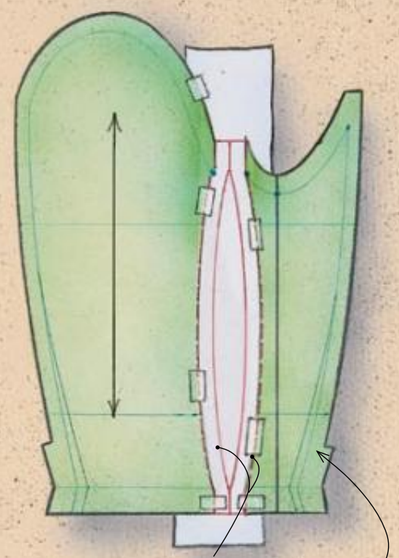
1. *Draw a line parallel to the grainline from underarm mark to hem.*



2. *Draw a parallel line 2 inches from first line, from armscye to hemline.*

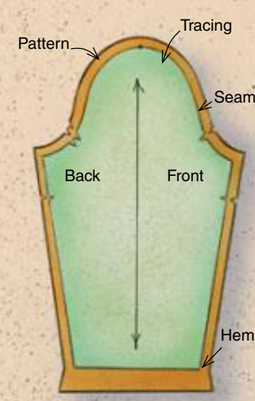


3. *Measure ¾ inch to either side of new line at elbow, and connect seam and hem with curves through the new points. Cut on curved lines.*

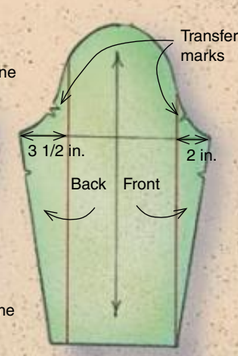


4. *Add seam allowances to each side, marking the new seams to narrow cuff if necessary.*

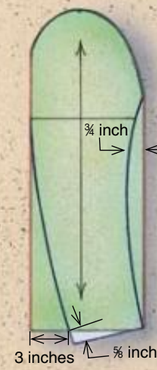
Converting symmetrical sleeves



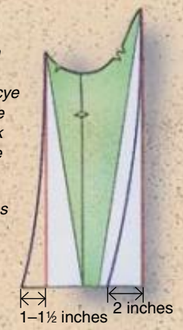
1. *Trace original pattern without seam allowances, transferring all markings.*



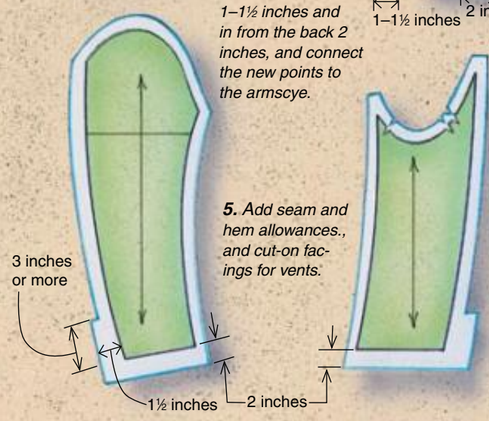
2. *On tracing, measure 2 inches in at the end of the front armscye seam, and 3½–4 inches from the back seam. Draw vertical lines parallel to the grain from armscye to hem. Cut tracing apart to these lines; tape pieced together on original seamline, matching notches.*



3. *Measure ¾ inch in at elbow in front, and in 3 inches at hem in back. Connect armscye to hem through these points. Drop the back seam ⅝ inch for ease if desired.*



4. *Drop new grainlines from the armscye seam ends to the hemline. Measure out from the front 1–1½ inches and in from the back 2 inches, and connect the new points to the armscye.*



5. *Add seam and hem allowances., and cut-on facings for vents.*

www.threadsmagazine.com

Pintuck trios, sewn at right angles, create a whole new fabric.

Terrific Twin Needle Effects

Mix three classic techniques with imagination to create a dozen-plus surface and edge embellishments

by Carol Laflin Ahles
(from issue #107)

One reward of sewing comes from taking an understated fabric like linen or batiste, altering it with interesting stitched effects and a thought to design, and then sewing it into an object of beauty. Place a twin needle in your machine and a wonderful array of embellishments can be easily, and sometimes magically, created. Twin needles are often associated with heirloom sewing, and rightly so, but don't think they are limited to that world—they can be used to finish sporty or tailored garments or to create wild and wacky effects on almost any fabric.

Two-in-one

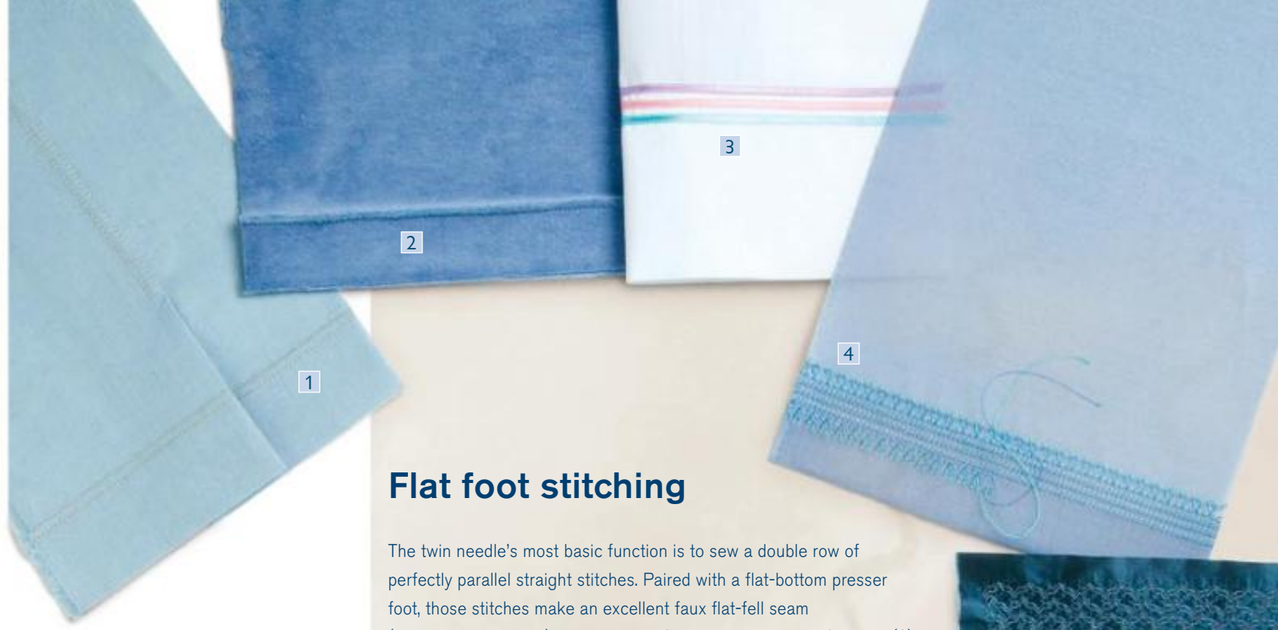
Sometimes called double needles, twin needles work in most zigzag sewing machines (some machines with a side-loading bobbin are the exception). Attached to a single shaft, they are inserted into the machine as one. The machine throat plate and presser foot must each have a hole wide enough to accommodate both needles, and if you want to use a zigzag or other decorative stitch, to accommodate them through its widest movement.

Each needle is threaded from its own spool on top of the machine; the bobbin is threaded with a single thread as usual and serves both needles. When the machine is set to straight-stitch, the needle threads form two parallel rows of straight stitches on the top of the fabric and the bobbin thread forms a zigzag pattern on the bottom.

The effects you achieve sewing with twin needles depend on the way you choose and combine equipment and fabric: the distance between the needles, the type of presser foot, the fabric, thread, stitch choice, and even the needle shape play interdependent roles. The examples shown here are divided into three categories based on the equipment most responsible for their look—a flat presser foot, a grooved presser foot, and a wing needle as one of the "twins."

Twin needle basics

Appropriate fabrics span everything from silk organza to polar fleece, the effects vary from fine, delicate pintucks in batiste to



Photos: Scott Phillips

Flat foot stitching

The twin needle's most basic function is to sew a double row of perfectly parallel straight stitches. Paired with a flat-bottom presser foot, those stitches make an excellent faux flat-fell seam (see sample 1, above); produce a perfect cover-stitch hem for knits (2); and apply narrow ribbon quickly, sewing both edges in one pass (3).

Creative and exciting uses for a twin needle include patterns featuring a different color thread in each needle (4); allover patterns composed of decorative stitches (5); and discreet pin-striped effects of closely and evenly spaced rows (6).

On sheer fabric the twin needle creates an excellent stand-in for shadow work, as the bobbin thread zigzags under the fabric between the two rows of stitches on top (7). Use it on a single layer or through two layers to secure a hem, cutting the bottom fabric off above the stitches (8). If you use a long stitch length, the zigzag will be less dense, so place a length of pearl cotton under the fabric, between the needles, while you are stitching to intensify the shadow effect (9).

Grooved foot stitching

Add a grooved foot to the twin needle set-up and you introduce texture to the effect. A foot with a wide, shallow groove, such as a satin-stitch foot, creates a soft peak of fabric between the rows of stitches. The effects possible with a shallow, grooved foot vary with fabric choice and machine tension setting, so experiment.

A foot with narrow, deep grooves, such as a pintuck foot, creates tight, crisp peaks. The multiple grooves in the foot serve as a guide for sewing closely spaced pintucks evenly. If you don't have a pintuck foot you can test this concept using a buttonhole foot; shift the needles so they are aligned over one of the grooves. For an heirloom effect on lightweight fabric, use a foot with fine grooves (1, above and at right). Some lightweight fabrics will make only shallow pintucks (2). Heavier fabrics require a foot with larger grooves—and the results are more substantial (3 and 4).

On some fabrics pintucks sewn on the lengthwise grain pucker more than those sewn on the cross-grain. Cording, fed under the fabric as you stitch, stabilizes the pintuck and reduces puckering (5). On sheer fabrics, a contrasting cord will add a shadow of color.

Pintuck effects need not be confined to the straight and narrow—you can create intricate geometric patterns or curved, swooping ones (6).

ONLINE EXTRA

Visit www.threadsmagazine.com to print out our Twin Needle Reference Chart, a detailed guide to setting up your machine for different twin needle effects.

Double wing needle stitching

Use a double wing needle (a universal needle paired with a wing needle, which has little fins) to create a hemstitching effect. Choose a straight stitch or narrow decorative stitch and increase the top tension slightly. The wing needle will spread the fabric threads apart to form a row of small holes (1). If you stitch one row and then turn the fabric around and stitch a second row from the other direction, carefully guiding the wing needle into each hole again, there will be a line of topstitching on both sides of the holes (2). Either way makes a nice hem finish on sheers (3).

WHAT THE NEEDLE BOX TELLS YOU

contrasting topstitching on denim, and the uses range from utility sewing to elaborate embellishment.

Choose the right twin needle

Fine needles, closely spaced, are for lightweight fabrics. As the needles go up in size, the space between them is also increased, and they are intended for heavier fabrics. The options for needle types include sharp, metallica, stretch, denim, and machine embroidery (see photos at right). There is also a combination with one double wing needle and one universal needle, called a wing needle, which is used for hemstitching.

And the right presser foot

A flat presser foot ensures that the fabric stays flat between the two lines of stitches. A ridged or grooved foot encourages the fabric to form peaks or tucks between them. The presser feet pictured here are examples of some choices.

Change stitch width with caution

A decorative stitch suitable for a single needle can cause a twin needle to jam or break. Always turn the machine wheel by hand to see that there is sufficient space in the throat plate and presser foot needle hole to accommodate the extra width of the twin needle moving through the decorative stitch.

Tension has an effect

Be sure your machine is properly threaded. Loosen the upper tension to keep the fabric flat and reduce puckering. Tighten the upper tension to lift the fabric under a grooved foot and create tucks.

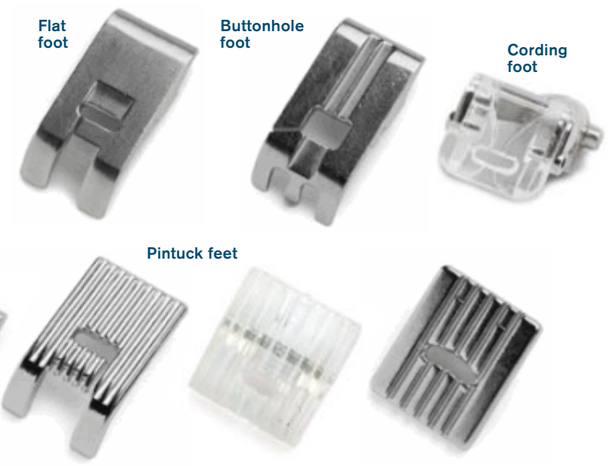
Skip the stabilizer

Don't use a stabilizer (other than spray starch) for pintucks, texturing, or shadow work.

Explore the possibilities

The next time you lay out fabric to cut, save a few scraps and explore some of my twin needle techniques. Let the samples shown here and on the blouse on the cover inspire you to experiment and incorporate these terrific effects in your garment or accessory designs. ♦

Carol Laflin Ahles is the author of Fine Machine Sewing *(The Taunton Press, rev. ed. 2001, softcover update 2003).*



Improving the Bottom Line

How to choose hand- and machine-sewn hem finishes

By Alice Allen
(from issue #16)

Fashion news nearly always concerns itself with hemlines, but generally the newsworthy item is length, and not technique. Fortunately, after many years of dictating hemlines, today's fashion houses have conceded to the demands of modern life: different lengths for different lifestyles.

Regardless of the length, a hemline calls for a finished edge at the bottom of the garment. Except in the case of fabrics such as tulle, net, and felt, or with borders that are embroidered, which merely need to be cut to length, hems usually require turning under and stitching to the garment. Simple as this may sound, there are countless hemming techniques. These techniques are dependent upon style, fabric texture, and the available tools.

Planning

Planning for hems should begin at the fabric store. The yardage you purchase must allow you enough length to turn up an appropriate hem. Bulky fabrics, knits, and full, flared skirts will have narrow hems. Lightweight fabrics will often have deep hems, and sheer fabrics traditionally have rolled edges if cut on the bias, and very wide hems if cut on the straight grain. Plaids, border designs, and horizontal stripes need careful planning for the best effect in final hemming, so allow extra of these fabrics for maximum flexibility.

Here are some general guidelines for hem depth as it relates to fashion style:

Skirts/Dresses
- Flared or gore: 2 to 3 inches
- Straight: 3 inches
- Circular: up to 1 inch
- Children's: 3 to 5 inches

Blouses/Shirts
- Overblouse: 1 to 1½ inches
- Shirttail: up to 1 inch

Jackets: 1½ to 2 inches
Straight-leg pants: 1½ to 2 inches

The bias-cut flounce at the hem of Giorgio Armani's linen skirt was serger-overcast, then carefully seamed and beautifully pressed around its graceful bottom line. (Photo by Donato Sardella for W)

www.threadsmagazine.com

Even if you need no extra length for a turned-up hem, for fitting flexibility it's a good idea to allow an inch or two when you're cutting out your garment.

Before hemming the otherwise completed garment, let it hang unhemmed for a day or two (allow maximum time for a bias-cut or stretchy garment). This will relax the garment, ensuring that its lines will drape properly and that the hem won't grow.

Final measurement

Mark the turnup location you want with a chalk or pin line. On most styles you'll want the hem parallel to the floor. For utmost accuracy, have someone mark your hem while you stand naturally, in one position, with your body weight distributed evenly, and wearing the garment with suitable undergarments, shoes, and a belt, if the garment requires one. As your hemming assistant walks around you, he or she should measure the skirt hem from the floor upward with a yardstick or hem marker.

If an assistant is not available, the next best choice is to place your unhemmed garment on a dress form that conforms to your body size, shape, and height. If you don't have a dress form, use a hem marker, like the one in the photo at right, that will permit you to mark your garment as you wear it, standing naturally. The absolute last choice is to hem the garment by measuring it flat on an ironing board. If this is your only option, try the garment on several times during the pinning process so you can adjust your measurements for the varying contours of your figure.

Mark the hem length at the outer sweep of the skirt, every 2 or 3 inches. Then check for evenness, correcting any marks that are obviously out of line.

Raw-edge finishing

The next step is to trim the garment to the hem depth you've decided on and finish the raw edge. For an edge cut on the straight or near-straight of grain, turn the hem to the inside of the garment on the marked line, and trim the side seam allowances in the hem turnup area so the seams are graded. Then baste ½ inch from the fold, establish the cutting line with chalk and a hem gauge (the familiar 6-inch metal sewing ruler with a sliding marker is ideal), and trim away the excess fabric.

Unlike an edge cut on the straight grain, a curved hem inevitably has excess fabric in the turnup area. This excess must be eliminated before the edge is finished to prevent bulk and show-through where hem meets garment. To keep the excess fabric to a minimum, cut the curved-edge hem less deep than the straight-cut hem. To shrink the fullness from the outer edges, sew short lines of ease stitches (10 stitches to the inch) at intervals ¼ inch from the raw edge of the hem. Put the garment on the ironing board, wrong side out, and pull up the ease thread at each interval, fitting the hem to the garment. Place a piece of heavy paper (a grocery bag is perfect) between the hem and the garment. Press lightly with steam to shrink out the fullness, keeping the iron perpendicular to the horizontal hem so you won't stretch it sideways. This technique works beautifully with all natural fibers, and to some extent with synthetics. Tie off the ease threads on the inside of the hem.

Now you need to select a finish for the raw edge. Fabric texture—whether bulky, slick, raveled, or tightly or loosely woven—usually determines the choice, but sometimes more than one finish is appropriate.

Seam binding—Seam binding is attached to the unfinished, turned-up edge by sewing machine and is suited to fabrics that ravel easily or have a coarse edge. It is designed to be stiff enough to lie flat without drooping over to expose the hem edge, even though it is attached at its bottom edge only, as shown in the drawing at right. Whichever technique you eventually use to attach the hem to the garment, the stitches will be concealed by the binding.

Polyester seam binding needn't be preshrunk. With fiber other than polyester, steam-shrink the binding, shaping it to match any curve in the hem. Beginning at a side seam, place the wrong side of the tape to the right side of the hem, with the top edge of the tape ¼ inch above the hem edge. This overlap provides better protection for the raw edge than flush placement would, and it allows the edge thickness to taper off for less bulk.

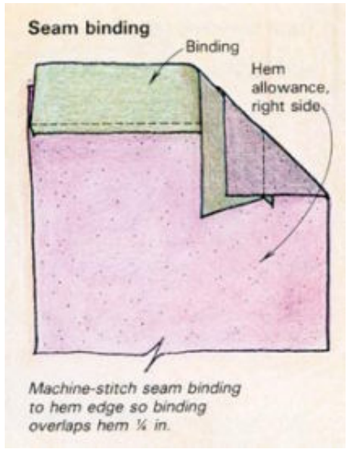
Machine-stitch the binding to the hem along the lower tape edge, using a medium-length straight stitch. Turn under the cut edge of the seam binding for a neat finish when you get back to the starting point.

Machine overcasting—Machine overcasting, by serger or zigzag sewing machine, can effectively cover ravelly edges. Machine zigzag stitches control raveling with minimum bulk, while serging can simultaneously cover and trim the raw edge to size.

If you are serging the outer edge, run the overlock stitch around the outer hem edge. If you prefer to zigzag, stitch a medium-width, medium-length zigzag along the outer edge, with the outer stitch falling on the edge of the cloth (wide zigzags tend to bunch up the fabric). Either finish is appropriate for medium-heavyweight washable fabrics with coarse or ravelly edges.

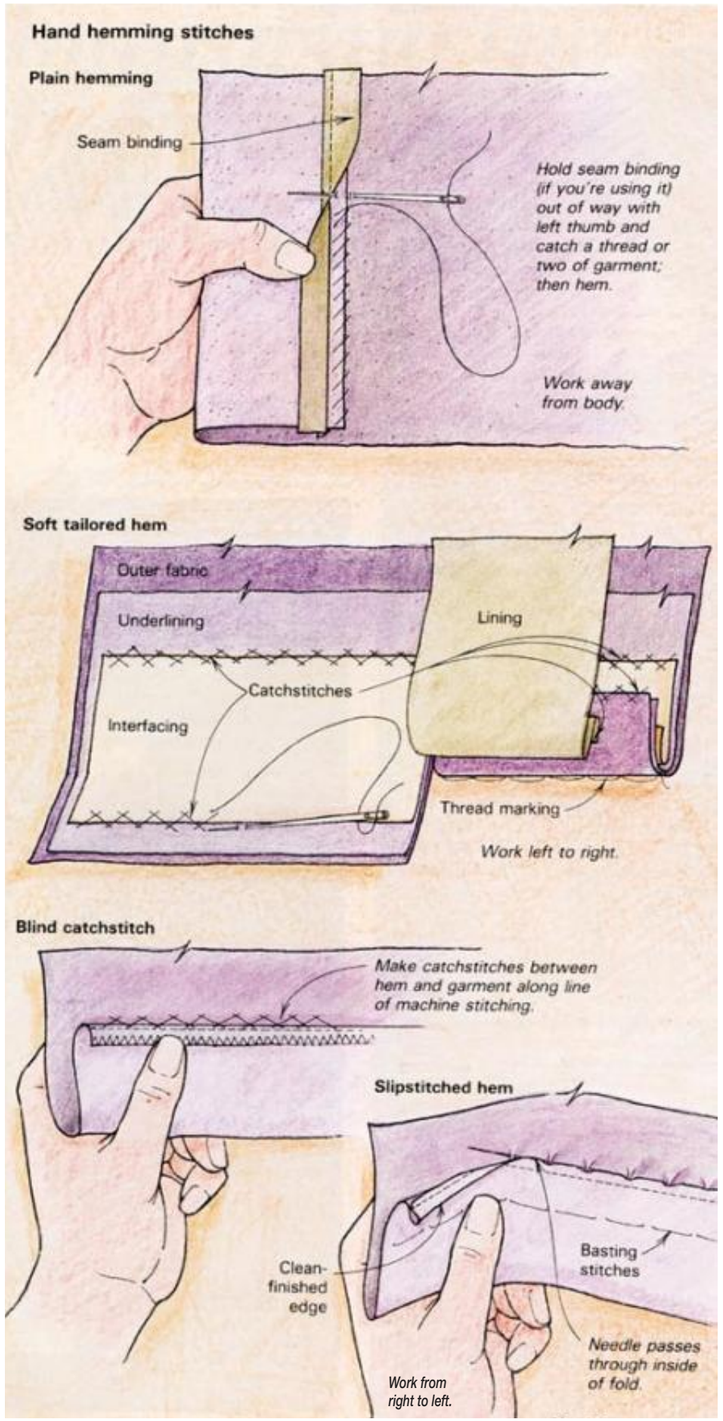
I use the machine blind hemstitch (four straight stitches followed by a zigzag stitch) as an edge finish. It is frequently just the right amount of protection against seam raveling, yet it is even less bulky than overcasting.

Clean-finishing—This is a machine-stitched finish in which the outer edge of



Machine-stitch seam binding to hem edge so binding overlaps hem ¼ in.

A chalking hem marker deposits a line of chalk on your hemline when you squeeze the bulb. As long as you stand naturally, it's ideal when you have to make hems by yourself.


Hand hemming stitches
Plain hemming
Seam binding
Hold seam binding (if you're using it) out of way with left thumb and catch a thread or two of garment; then hem.
Work away from body.
Soft tailored hem
Outer fabric
Underlining
Lining
Catchstitches
Interfacing
Thread marking
Work left to right.
Blind catchstitch
Make catchstitches between hem and garment along line of machine stitching.
Slipstitched hem
Clean-finished edge
Basting stitches
Needle passes through inside of fold.
Work from right to left.

the hem is turned under approximately ¼ inch and stitched close to the fold. It is suitable on washable, tightly woven fabrics that are lightweight to medium weight. I like it on full, straight-cut, lightweight cotton skirts.

Pinked-and-straight-stitched finishing—A minimal edge treatment, this is appropriate for nonraveling fabric and garments you plan to line. However, unless your pinking shears are very sharp, pinking often chews the fabric, creating raveling where none had been, so it isn't my favorite. Sew a medium-length machine stitch around the outer edge of the hem, ¼ to ⅜ inch from the raw edge; then pink the hem's outer edge.

Attaching hem to garment

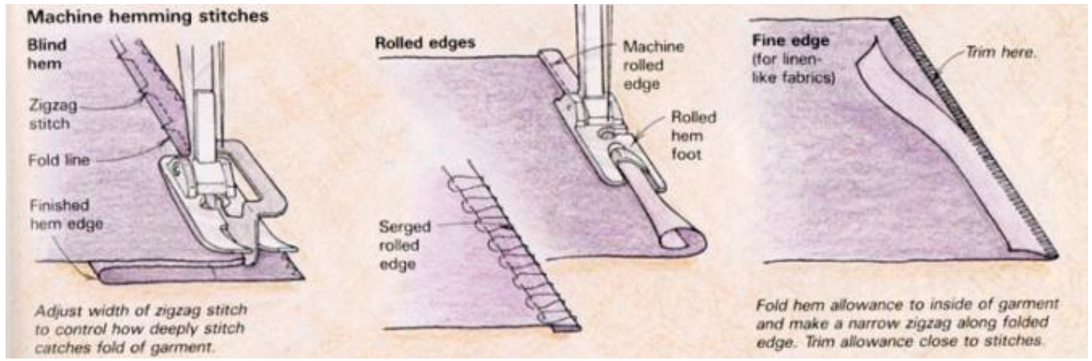
The final step in making a hem is attaching the turned-up edge to the garment with either hand or machine stitches. You should base your choice on the fabric type, the garment style, your tools, and your skill.

Hand hemming stitches—When done with the proper thread, tension, and stitch size, hand stitches create a high-quality hem. On the face of the garment, they should be almost invisible, catching only a thread or two, and if it's thick enough, just on the inside of the fabric. Hand-stitched hems should be made with one strand of matching thread cut the length of hand to elbow and with a thin, flexible needle. Begin with a backstitch in the side-seam allowance, and start new threads in the same way.

Plain hemming, also known as slant stitch or whipstitch (shown at top left), is often used with seam binding or clean-finished edges. It appears as even, slanted stitches along the outer hem edge. Right-handers should work with the basted lower garment edge in their left hand and sew away from the body, with the needle moving right to left, and at right angles to the hem, pricking the garment, then going through the hem edge. Whipstitching frays or breaks easily unless it is protected by seam binding.

The ***catchstitch*** is a hand zigzag stitch worked from left to right, with the needle held parallel to the hem edge, making the zigzags about ½ inch apart. Be careful to let the thread relax between stitches. Also prone to fraying if not protected, the catchstitch is more flexible and provides more even support than plain hemming. With a little practice, you can do it very quickly.

A common hem treatment that calls for the catchstitch is the ***soft tailored finish,*** shown at center left. For the well-defined but soft hem of underlined jackets or skirts in wool or linen, a bias-cut interfacing is placed between hem and garment. Cut bias strips of medium-weight woven interfacing 1 inch wider than the depth of the hem and long enough to fit the circumference of the hem. You can piece the strips


Machine hemming stitches
Blind hem
Zigzag stitch
Fold line
Finished hem edge
Adjust width of zigzag stitch to control how deeply stitch catches fold of garment.
Rolled edges
Machine rolled edge
Rolled hem foot
Serged rolled edge
Fine edge (for linen-like fabrics)
Trim here.
Fold hem allowance to inside of garment and make a narrow zigzag along folded edge. Trim allowance close to stitches.

to fit the garment circumference. Mark the finished garment edge with a thread line. Pin the interfacing on the wrong side of the garment, on top of the underlining, with its lower edge ⅜ inch below the thread-marked hemline. Attach both edges of the interfacing to the garment underlining with catchstitches. Turn the hem to the inside and catchstitch it to the underfacing. Then catchstitch the lining to the turned-up hem. Steam-press only to preserve the soft edge.

The ***blind catchstitch*** conceals the catchstitch between garment and hem. Machine stitch around the hem ¼ inch from the finished edge. Fold the hem at the turnup; then fold it back against the garment at the machine-stitch line, and make a catchstitch along the line of machine stitches, working from hem to garment. This invisible technique is appropriate on thick or heavy fabrics because the stitch doesn't travel over a bulky edge and will be less likely to dimple the face of the garment.

The ***slipstitch,*** sometimes called the blind-stitch, is also almost invisible on both sides of the garment. To make the slipstitch, clean-finish the raw edge, creating a fold, and then baste the hem to the garment ½ inch from the just-finished edge. Conceal the slipstitch inside the fold by passing the needle through the underside of the fold about ¼ inch. Next, prick through the fold to the garment fabric, moving the needle from right to left enough to catch a thread or two of the garment. Then slip the tip of the needle back into the fold, as shown at bottom left on the facing page. With practice, you won't have to entirely remove the needle from the fold until you run out of thread.

Machine hemming stitches—These stitches include the blind hem, straight stitches that go through the garment, and zigzagged and rolled hems that finish raw edges and complete the hem at the same time.

The ***blind hem*** requires a special machine foot, normally supplied with a zigzag machine that can produce the stitch, shown in the left drawing above. It is particularly suited to woolens and medium-weight fabrics, and with careful adjustment can produce excellent results, giving the illusion of handwork, yet with the strength and evenness of machine work. To make a blind hem, finish the raw edge; then baste the hem to the garment ½ inch below the raw edge. Turn the hem back against the garment, put the raw edge under the foot, and arrange the blade of the foot to touch the fold. The stitch will catch the folded hem every three or four stitches as it zigzags to the left. On most machines it's possible to fine-tune the stitch width to ensure that the needle barely catches the fold so it won't show too large a stitch on the right side when it's unfolded and pressed.

The ***machine-stitched, or topstitched, edge*** is the hem we've all seen on blue jeans. It can be used on a wide range of fabrics, from silkies to firm knits, and has found its way onto many styles of garments. For wovens, clean-finish the raw edge, or merely fold the edge under and hold by pressing, pinning, basting, or glue-sticking. Then stitch the edge to the garment, making sure the stitching is parallel to the hem. On bulky, more casual attire, and on knits, machine-stitched hems vary from ½ inch to the more common 1 inch. Shirts and silky dresses often use ¼-inch to ½-inch machine-stitched hems. I keep an eye on fashion ready-to-wear to watch the trends in machine hems, which, like silhouettes, vary from season to season and subtly dictate the current fashion feeling.

For knits, you can omit clean-finishing. Just turn the hem depth to the inside of the garment and machine-stitch the hem, catching the hem edge to the garment and finishing the edge at the same time. I get the most attractive results with a straight stretch stitch and a ballpoint needle. You can also use a double needle and two threads on top, keeping the raw edge underneath between the needles. The bobbin thread will zigzag over the edge, finishing it securely, and will form a slight ridge as it draws together the two rows of topstitching.

You can emphasize topstitched hems by using more rows of thread, usually ¼ to ⅛ inch apart. Each additional row of topstitching will also make the hem a bit stiffer, which adds emphasis. Experiment with the spacing of the rows, and with heavier, shinier, or contrasting threads for more impact.

The ***rolled edge*** is traditional, and appropriate, for the curved edges of chiffon or lightweight silks. Don't hesitate to consider machine-rolled hems for these and "many other lightweight fabrics and on straight or curved edges. The serger technique, for two- and three-thread machines, covers the roll with thread and usually creates the roll with carefully adjusted thread tension, as described in each serger manual. The sewing-machine version closes the roll with a line of straight stitches. It requires a special foot (available for all machines), shown in the center drawing above, to create the roll and keep it even as it is stitched. With matching threads, these are very subtle, high-quality finishes, and they are much easier to make than hand-rolled edges.

The ***fine-edge finish*** is appropriate for straight hems on lightweight linens and crisp, linen-textured fabrics. Turn back the hem allowance to the inside and press along the hem edge. Then sew a short, narrow stitch, and zigzag along the folded edge, with the right-hand zig falling just off the fabric, as shown in the right drawing above. Trim the excess fabric away on the back, as close as possible to the stitching.

* * *

When you've finished the last hemming stitch, critique the effect you've achieved by asking yourself the following questions: Is the hem inconspicuous, flat, smooth, and uniform in depth? Is the hem parallel to the floor? Is the hand-stitch tension even, uniformly spaced, and not too tight? Is the turned-up edge wide enough to provide the weight necessary for the garment to hang well?

Proper hemming is important. The hem should be the final touch to an attractive garment—a suitable finished edge. The hem speaks volumes; it is the silent voice of a garment beautifully constructed. ❑

Alice Allen wrote about fitting in Threads, *No. 12, page 71.*

Threads
MAGAZINE
December 1985/January 1986 Number 2

Sewing Hand-wovens

Techniques for shaping and finishing your garments

by Sandra Betzina
(from issue #2)

www.threadsmagazine.com

A garment constructed from handwoven fabric can be one of the most exciting pieces you own. If you choose a handwoven that picks up colors in companion pieces in your wardrobe, the finished garment will go with almost everything.

Choosing fabrics and patterns—Choose your fabrics carefully. Stiff or heavy fabrics make unflattering and uncomfortable garments. Loosely woven fabrics are weak and will pull away at darts, seams, and other stress points. The fabric will not retain its shape and is liable to catch on purse buckles and jewelry.

Handwovens rarely if ever have an exact repeat, and matching patterns is difficult, so avoid dominant plaids or crosswise stripes. Combining fabrics and materials often creates interesting effects. As a general rule, fabrics with metallic threads do not wear well.

A garment design with a minimum number of pieces and simple styling will show off handwoven fabrics to their best advantage. Unless the fabric is closely woven, a handwoven tends to grow with wear, so patterns for fitted clothing are not good choices. For example, traditional tailored pants will bag out of shape at the knees and seat. I successfully made pants using Issey Miyake's Vogue 1257, which are designed to be worn loose.

Pretesting and preshrinking—Before cutting into your handwoven fabric, make a pretest of the pattern from a fabric similar in weight and drape to get an idea of how the finished product will look. (Collars, facings, zippers, and pockets can be eliminated from the pretest to save time.) With a pretest, you can figure yardage requirements to the inch. Handwovens cost a lot both in time and money, so a pretest allows you to keep your investment to a minimum. Also, you can make alterations on the pretest and then transfer them to the paper pattern, avoiding the need to rip out seams in the garment itself. Seam changes in handwoven fabrics weaken the fibers, and clipping one wrong thread can make a hole.

Making pretests is also an excellent way to use up long-stored fabric that you might otherwise never use. Consider cutting up a worn chenille bedspread or an old, loosely woven woolen blanket.

Handwoven fabric is often preshrunk by the weaver after it comes off the loom. If it hasn't been, or if you're not sure, don't take a chance preshrinking it yourself—handweavers often combine fibers with different shrinkage rates. To prolong the life of a handwoven garment, I recommend dry cleaning.

Laying out—Before you begin, alter the tissue pattern for perfect fit, and trim excess tissue away from the cutting lines. To save fabric and ensure accuracy, lay out the fabric so that you are cutting through a single thickness. Crosswise and bias-grain cutting is acceptable only if the fabric is closely woven and strong both crosswise and lengthwise. Cutting along the grain is always preferable and will prevent the garment from sagging in stress areas, such as the seat, elbows, and knees.

Pattern weights are better than pins for keeping the pattern in place on the fabric. If the handwoven fabric moves, the tissue pattern can tear away from the pins. Packages of pattern weights, such as Weight Mates, are available commercially, but small canned goods or rocks will do the job.

Handle the newly cut pieces gently to prevent stretching and raveling. (Save all handwoven scraps—they can make an eye-catching binding, collar, or pocket on another garment.) Transfer all pattern markings to the fabric with tailor's tacks. Lines made with chalk and marking pens will rarely show up on the fabric, and cut notches will be lost when you overlock the edges in the next step.

After cutting and marking, gently lift each piece from the table and overlock all newly cut edges. If you do not have access to an overlock machine, run a straight medium-length machine stitch ¼ inch to ⅜ inch from all newly cut edges. Zigzag stitching on conventional home machines causes ruffled, stretched edges. To keep the raw edges from stretching as you overlock or straight-sew, push the handwoven fabric gently into the presser foot. Never pull it.

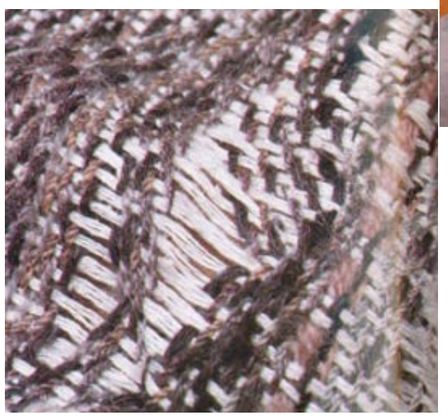
If your fabric is loosely woven and you can see that it is raveling badly, make a diluted mixture of Solons SOBO glue in a dish, and paint the raw edges with a small brush. The glue will halt the raveling process. If you handle your pieces gently, gluing is seldom necessary.

Shaping—Most handwovens are not as tightly woven as commercial weaves, so handwoven garments have a tendency to

To give them shape, Betzina applied fusible interfacing to the fronts, front facings, and upper and under collars of the jacket she's modeling on the facing page. The sleeves and back weren't fused, to allow the fabric to drape. Carol Horn, Vogue 1472; fabric by Tim Veness.

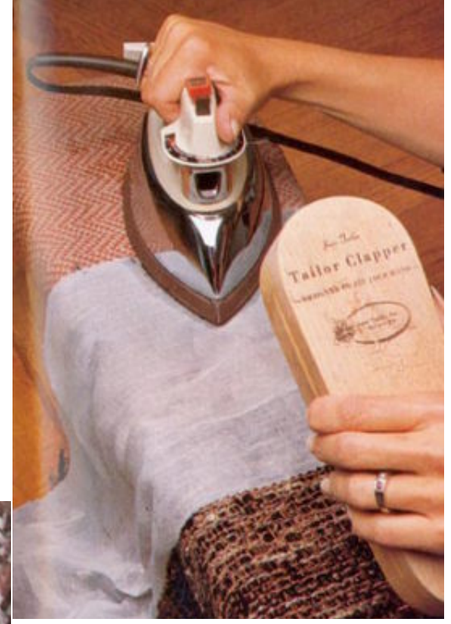
www.threadsmagazine.com

Handwovens often have such variety of texture and color that the finished garment will go with almost anything in your wardrobe. Betzina combines handwovens with suede, leather, and Ultrasuede and makes handknit and machine-knit collars and cuffs. Pants: Issey Miyake, Vogue 1257, top shown in photo at right: Alke Boker, Vogue 1438.

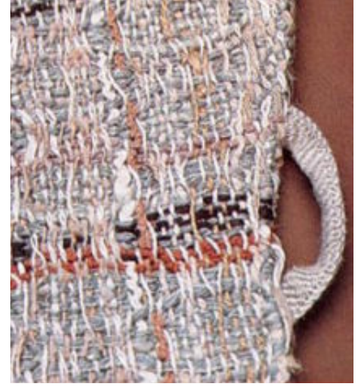


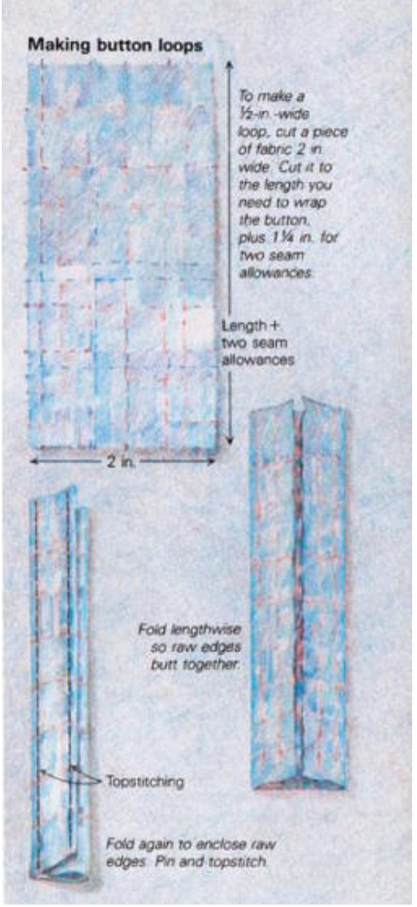
Weights are better than pins for holding the paper pattern in place on handwoven fabric (far left). With a long length of doubled, unknotted thread, Betzina makes tailor's tacks to transfer pattern marks (near left); lines made with chalk or marking pens rarely show up on textured fabric, and cut notches will be lost when edges are overlocked. Because handwoven fabric tends to grow, Betzina sews stay tape along the shoulder and neckline seams to prevent them from sagging. First she pins the tape along the shoulder seam (below left), then sews it along her ⅝-inch seam line and presses it flat.

Choose fabrics carefully. If they are woven too loosely, the threads will pull away at stress points, such as seams and darts (below).



When pressing handwoven garments (photo above), use plenty of steam, and pound the seams with a tailor's clapper to eliminate bulk. Let the garment dry completely before removing it from the ironing surface to keep the fabric from stretching. To prolong the life of the garment, have it dry-cleaned.




Making button loops
To make a ½-in.-wide loop, cut a piece of fabric 2 in. wide. Cut it to the length you need to wrap the button, plus 1¼ in. for two seam allowances.
Length + two seam allowances
2 in.
Fold lengthwise so raw edges butt together.
Topstitching
Fold again to enclose raw edges. Pin and topstitch.

Betzina makes loops instead of buttonholes to give the garment a quality finish (top right) and selects ivory or horn buttons to accent the fabrics (bottom right).

"grow." After the garment piece has been cut out and handled a bit you will notice a ¼-inch to ½-inch difference in size when comparing the handwoven to the pattern. This is perfectly acceptable, except at the shoulders and neckline. Stay tape will return the handwoven to its cut size and will prevent the neck and shoulders of the garment from losing their shape. However, do not use stay tape on lengthwise seams or the fabric will ripple at the seams after a few wearings.

Stay tape is available by the yard at the notions counter, but ¼-inch-wide strips of selvage from a piece of silk or lightweight cotton make good substitutes. With the tissue pattern as a guide, cut the stay tape to length for the shoulder and neckline seams. On the wrong side of the handwoven piece, center and pin the tape on the ⅝-inch seam line. To ease the handwoven to the stay tape, simply push the handwoven gently under the tape. Sew along the seam line and press flat.

A lining gives the inside of a handwoven garment a finished appearance. The lining is constructed separately and attached at the crosswise seams of the garment. It protects the fragile seam allowances of the handwoven and allows free drape at the lengthwise side seams. Bemberg rayon lining in light and medium weights are excellent for handwovens. Because the handwoven fabric will stretch in both length and width, cut the lining 1 inch longer than required, and sew ½-inch seams.

Lining is preferable to underlining. Underlining is cut to the shape of the garment piece and basted or glued to it before the garment is constructed, so the pieces are sewn together as one. However, because of the different rates of lengthwise and crosswise stretch of the two fabrics, underlining is unsuitable for handwoven fabrics. At lengthwise seams, an underlining will create the same rippling effect as stay tape.

Interfacing will stabilize areas that need support, such as necklines, plackets, collars, and cuffs. If you are making a structured garment, you might want to fuse Stacy's Easy-Knit or another fusible with some stretch qualities to all pieces in which a definite shape is important. For example, fusing a jacket front in a tailored jacket will give more stability to the front piece, allowing perfect lapels. In the jacket shown on page 42, Carol Horn's Vogue 1472, Stacy's Easy-Knit was fused to jacket fronts, front facings, and upper and under collars. You might want to fuse an entire garment for a very structured shape, but think carefully before you do. Part of the beauty of the handwoven fabric is its drapability. Do not fuse any piece where drapability is desired—for example, pants, loose tops, or loose coats. The sleeves and back of the Carol Horn jacket were not fused to allow for softness in the sleeves and drapability in the large pleat in the center back.

Fusible interfacing is preferable to "sew-in" interfacing, woven or nonwoven, especially on collars and lapels, because it prevents raveling. When fusing interfacing to large handwoven pieces, make the handwoven piece conform to the interfacing by pushing the handwoven gently beneath it; even though the handwoven piece and the fusible were cut from the same pattern, you will be amazed by how much the handwoven has grown.

Facings can often be leather, suede, Skinner's manmade Ultraseude, or Facile. Machine or hand knitting can also be used instead of facings, as shown in the photos on page 43.

Sewing, pressing, and finishing—For ease in sewing, an even-feed foot is a must. The teeth on the even-feed foot lock the top and bottom fabric pieces together, allowing them to move under the needle as one piece and preventing the seam from stretching and creeping.

Sew all seams with a medium-length stitch, and press the seam allowances to one side, away from the center of the garment. Then topstitch on the right side of the fabric ¼ inch from the original seam, catching the seam allowances underneath. The topstitched seam makes the handwoven more durable, and the seams lie flat with minimum bulk.

In addition to fusible interfacing, extra support is needed behind buttonholes, eyelets, and snaps. A closely woven cotton, linen, or commercially available interfacing such as Stacy's Veriform will give them something stable to grab onto. To reinforce a buttonhole, slide behind it a small piece of interfacing, cut 1 inch larger than the buttonhole in all directions. It is not necessary to finish the edges of the interfacing. After you have completed the buttonhole, rub all the cut edges with diluted SOBO glue for strength.

I prefer loops to buttonholes for a long-lasting, quality finish. To make a loop of interfaced handwoven fabric, or a contrasting fabric, cut a piece of fabric four times as wide as you want the finished loop to be and long enough to go around your button. Add an extra 1¼ inches in length for two seam allowances. Fold in lengthwise raw edges so that they butt together. Press, and fold the loop lengthwise again so that the raw edges are enclosed. Press, pin, then topstitch with two rows of stitching, as shown in the drawing above. Press and pound with a tailor's clapper; then insert the loop in the seam. (A tailor's clapper is a shaped piece of hardwood, available in the notions department, but any small piece of hardwood will do.) Loops can be made in leather or suede to match other garment trims.

Choice of buttons should be made carefully to enhance the natural fibers. Fossilized ivory or horn are excellent. I order buttons from Paco Despacio (Buttonsmith.com).

Many handwovens are a combination of fibers that require different pressing temperatures, so always use a press cloth. Cheesecloth or 100% cotton scraps make excellent press cloths. Press with plenty of steam, pounding each seam with the tailor's clapper. Pounding flattens seams and eliminates a bulky appearance. To keep it from stretching, allow the garment to dry before moving it off the ironing surface. ❑

Sandra Betzina writes a syndicated sewing column for The San Francisco Chronicle and is the author of Power Sewing: New ways to make fine clothes fast. All fabrics by Tim Veness and Jackson Allen, unless otherwise noted. Photos by Joe Locke.